

***Tales Told Out of School: Ball State University African American Alumni Oral  
History Project II***

**Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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## Abstract

In the 1920s and 30s, sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd conducted a study on a municipality they thought most represented the average American small city. The site they chose was Muncie, Indiana, and the study resulted in the books *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* and *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts*. Despite its prominence in the community, the Lynds ignored the African American population of the city. Decades later, when the history of Ball State University was written by Dr. Anthony O. Edmonds and Dr. E. Bruce Geelhoed, there was very little historical data regarding the African American student body or local community. Therefore, there was very little material in the book presenting this perspective of history. The Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project has sought out to change this through interviews with former students from both the Muncie community and across the country, and making these interviews available to the public through the Ball State University Libraries' Digital Media Repository. In doing so, we hope that their stories will be considered when future students and researchers study the history of Ball State, Muncie, or college student life of previous decades in general. These interviews can be found at <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/search/collection/BSUAAAImOrH>.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my professor and thesis advisor Dr. Michael Doyle for inviting me to work on such an amazing project and for everything he did to make the project a success. I am also grateful to my fellow team members – Allison Hunt, Anna Muckenfuss, Jenn Kunkle, Lauren Hendricks, La'Vonte Pugh, Marquice Gee, Mitch Kissick, Nick Evans, and Tanner Barton – and the Assistant Project Director, Frank Lacopo, for making up such an unforgettable team. My parents, Cameron and Joann Munro, who drove six-hours round trip to support me at our project showcase. And, of course, to my two astonishing interviewees, Marwin D. Strong and Roland A. Wiley, Jr., I wish them both the best in breaking the glass ceilings that stand above them.

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## Process Analysis Statement

When deciding on what classes to take in the spring semester of my junior year, I thought I'd take it easy with only fourteen credit hours. As the fall semester neared its end though, that completely changed. It's not uncommon to receive last-minute mass emails from the professors seeking out students to fill remaining seats in their colloquium classes. So when I received an email from Dr. Michael Doyle about his oral history course, I didn't think much of it. That evening however, I received a second email from Dr. Doyle asking me personally if I would be interested in taking the final spot in his class. I would be the only anthropologist on the team, which he felt would be a great addition. I was extremely flattered by the invitation, but definitely needed some time to think it over. Looking over the syllabus Dr. Doyle had forwarded me, I knew the course was going to involve a lot of work, far more than I had originally anticipated for that semester. But this was an amazing opportunity, not only to learn about oral history, but to take part in a project as well. How could I possibly pass this up? After a good night's sleep – and a call home to my mother to talk it over– I replied to Dr. Doyle's email, informing him that he could count me in. Though there were a few late nights in the coming semester in which I questioned why I would ever put myself through such work, if I had the opportunity to go back to that weekend I wouldn't change my answer. Participating in the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project was one of the best decisions I made in my college career.

The team was made up mostly of fellow Honors students, though there were two who were strictly History majors. Additionally, two were Telecommunications Production majors, which definitely came in handy when we got to filming our interviews. Regardless of our majors

or academic background, we were all passionate about getting the voices of Ball State's African American alumni heard. Our goal was to continue the work of the previous Phase I oral history team from spring of 2015. Like them, we would each interview two alumni for around one to two hours each, asking them about various topics such as their childhoods, their time at Ball State University, and where their education took them in life. In doing so, we hoped to fill in the gaps of Ball State's student history, which up until recently was glaringly lacking in local and student African American voices.

During the first phase of the project in 2015, there was no budget, which limited recruitment of interviewees to those who could drive to Ball State University for the interview and return home the same day. In 2017, however, the project received a \$20,000 grant that allowed us to seek out interviewees who lived farther away. Though we did still select some alumni who lived nearby, we were also capable of flying alumni in from across the country. The extra funding also allowed us to travel as a class to Washington, DC and explore the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which had just opened the previous September.

To better understand the context of our project, as well as how to conduct an oral history ourselves, we were assigned three books for the class: *Ball State University: An Interpretive History*, by Dr. Anthony O. Edmonds and Dr. E. Bruce Geelhoed (both professors in the BSU History Department); *The Other Side of Middletown: Exploring Muncie's African American Community*, by Luke Eric Lassiter, Hurley Goodall, Elizabeth Campbell, and Michelle Natasya Johnson; and *Doing Oral History*, by Donald A. Ritchie.

*Ball State University* gave us the context of our project; it showed us the gaps in Ball State's history that needed to be filled, as well as some interesting information about our university's history. Out of almost 300 pages of text, only a few pages mentioned the African American student body. Though Ball State, like many universities, contains a majority of white students, this was unacceptable to us; surely the distinctive experiences of African American students deserved more than just a couple of pages.

Our second required reading, *The Other Side of Middletown*, was a compilation of work by students in 2003 as a part of a Virginia Ball project. The students performed ethnographic studies on the Muncie area, particularly focusing on the African American population. This study revealed much that had been ignored in previous studies decades before, including the two Middletown studies that were conducted by sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd in the 1920s and 1930s, resulting in the books *Middletown* and *Middletown in Transition* respectively. The Lynds' studies almost completely ignored the black residents of Muncie, despite the prominent role this part of the population had played in day-to-day Muncie life. *The Other Side of Middletown* discussed issues such as legal and social segregation of Muncie, life within Black communities and how it had changed over the decades, as well as some of the contemporary problems in the Black community, and the Muncie community in general that have yet to be resolved. Our final reading, *Doing Oral History*, explained just as the title implies, how to conduct oral history interviews. In his book, Ritchie discusses how to set up for an interview, including the necessary equipment and research. Additionally, he notes important things to keep in mind while preparing for and conducting the interview, such as carrying out thorough research beforehand, maintaining eye-contact with the interviewee, and keeping the interviewee on topic.

As we steadily read and discussed these three books, my classmates and I were simultaneously broken up into three groups, each in charge of a specific task. One was in charge of planning our class field trip to Washington, DC, which we would take in February; the second was responsible for planning and preparing for our public showcase event that would take place at the end of April, and the final group, which I was a part of, was tasked with selecting potential interviewees from a list of alumni and preparing letters inviting them to participate in our project.

In selecting a preliminary list of interview candidates, my groupmates and I considered a three main factors: age, distance from Muncie, and major/occupation. We wanted to make sure to include some older candidates, particularly individuals who could potentially be incapable of traveling and participating in the project in the future, should the project continue. Due to our increased funding, we also looked into alumni who lived further than a day's drive away in addition to some that lived closer by. Finally, we wanted to make sure we had a variety of majors and occupations. Sometimes this did mean setting a few names aside, as we did not want to inadvertently select individuals who had all pursued similar fields of study. In the end, our final selection included politicians, architects, sports coaches, teachers, and even a former member of the Jamaican Olympic bobsled team.

Once we made our initial selection, Dr. Doyle sent a letter that we had composed to each of the candidates. Unfortunately, some did not respond; others were uninterested or unable to attend for various reasons. As time went on, we had to narrow our search to those who lived within a few hours' drive of campus, as we would be able to more easily accommodate these individuals in shorter amounts of time.

The month of February couldn't have come soon enough, as all of us greatly anticipated our trip to DC. On Friday afternoon, February 10<sup>th</sup>, we met at the Burkhardt Building on the Ball State campus, where we gathered into vans and drove to the Indianapolis International Airport. Our flight was delayed a couple hours, resulting in a very bored – and very hungry – group of college students wandering around the terminal. We didn't arrive in DC until close to midnight, and were incredibly lucky to jump onto the last subway tram headed from the airport to our hotel.

We met the following morning in the hotel lobby to head down to the National Museum of American History. Here we were given the opportunity to explore on our own, and form ideas for questions we might ask our interviewees. After lunch, we were free to explore DC however we liked. Allison Hunt, a fellow classmate, and I wandered around the National Mall, visiting the National Air and Space Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian. That evening, the whole class gathered at the Washington Monument and visited the Lincoln Memorial, the World War II Memorial, and finally the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. All were beautiful at night. The symbology of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial was particularly powerful: Dr. King is carved away from a large stone – similar to the faces of Mount Rushmore carved out of the cliffside – seemingly incomplete, just as the fight for civil rights was incomplete at his death, and still is to this day.

Later that night, we attended a premier of the documentary film *I Am Not Your Negro*. Based on some of James Baldwin's unfinished writings, the film told the history of civil rights in the United States. This documentary, which I highly recommend for everyone to see, gave us all a lot to think about, as well as a new perspective to consider when visiting the National Museum of African American History and Culture the following day.



As with the American history museum, we were given the opportunity to disperse and explore the African American history museum on our own, but we were also put into three groups that were each in charge of developing potential interview questions from one of three galleries of the museum: history, culture, and community. I, along with classmates Mitch Kissick and Lauren Hendricks, was assigned to the history galleries. This section of the museum is split up into three floors that lead visitors through history in chronological order. Guests take an elevator to the bottom floor, which begins with the theme of slavery and freedom (1400 to 1877), then move upwards through the themes of defending and defining freedom (1877-1968) and changes in America in recent decades (1968-present). The four and a half hours we had to spend in the museum was barely enough to cover the history galleries, let alone the culture and community galleries! Realizing how little time we had left by the time we made it to the third history floor, my group mates and I rushed through the final displays so that we might have time to visit the other galleries. The culture galleries focused much on music, theater, and other visual arts that African Americans have greatly influenced, while the communities galleries were mostly based on African Americans in sports and their service in the military.

Unfortunately, our trip came to an end, and that Sunday evening we boarded our plane back to Indiana.

A few weeks after our return, we attended a workshop in the University Archives and Special Collections on Conducting Research on Ball State University History and African-American Alumni. The presenters, Michael Szajewski, M.L.S., Archivist for Digital Development and University Records; and Brandon Picczko, M.L.S., Digital Archivist for Manuscript Collections, explained the layout of the Ball State University Libraries' Digital

Media Repository, as well as how best to utilize it. This database gave us access to a great amount of relevant Ball State University documents, such as the *Ball State Daily* newspaper, to develop background research on our interviewees, as well as questions for our interview.

Conducting thorough background research was important for building rapport with our interviewees. With the knowledge gained from our research, we would be able to craft interview questions specifically pertaining to certain aspects of our interviewees' lives. Furthermore, we would be able to discuss these aspects in more detail, and keep the conversation going better, than if we entered the interview having done little or no research.

The main points we wanted to cover when developing a list of questions included our interviewee's childhood, grade-school education, what brought them to Ball State University, how their education at Ball State influenced their careers, and what sort of discrimination – if any – they had experienced throughout their lives. There were, of course, many tangents great and small that we could take based on what our research brought up on our interviewees – and when the moment came, based on where the flow of conversation took us. However, it was also important that we not let the interviewee take a tangent too far, otherwise the shift back to the original topic of conversation could sound awkward. Similarly, we learned how important it was to pose our questions in a generally chronological and topically grouped fashion whenever possible so as to avoid awkward jumps from topic to topic. Perhaps the most important thing we needed to keep in mind was though it was important for us to have a good idea of what kinds of questions we wanted to ask – and in what order – beforehand, we were also reminded by Dr. Doyle that we wanted our interviews to flow like a conversation, not a rigid question and answer session. We needed to be able to make eye-contact with our interviewees throughout almost the

entire interview, meaning we couldn't be constantly looking down at our questions and notes, as doing so could reduce our rapport with our interviewees. Remembering our questions would be very important as, once the moment had passed for a question to be asked, it might become too late to bring it up tactfully.

As we were beginning to develop some basic questions and receive our first interviewee assignments, our three technology oriented classmates, Mitch Kissick, Nick Evans and La'Vonte Pugh all began the preparations for the room and filming equipment we would use for our interviews. As soon as they were ready, they broke us up into two groups to teach how to use the equipment, as we were each responsible for filming two of our classmates' interviews. The two main components to master that were absolutely critical to the high quality interviews we were aiming for were the camera and the microphones. After showing us how to set up and configure the camera and audio settings, each of us less technologically adept students went one-by-one practicing what we had just learned. Thankfully, none of us would be alone during any given interview, so if all else failed we would be able to obtain assistance from a classmate.

My first interview was with Marwin D. Strong, a Muncie native who is heavily involved in the local community. Born into a high poverty area, growing up wasn't easy for Strong. It wasn't uncommon for the electricity or water being cut off from his family's house. For a brief time when Strong was around ten years old, his family moved to California. During this time he witnessed the murder of a Crips Gang member by a group of the rival gang, the Bloods. Almost immediately after this his mother moved the family back to Muncie.

During his teenage years, Strong drifted into drug dealing. Things seemed to be going pretty well for him until one evening at a party, when another partygoer, likely someone jealous

of Strong's success, spiked his drink with iodine. Through the following weeks, Strong became increasingly ill; finally one evening his mother found him in a seizure. He spent the next month in a coma, and another two years in the hospital slowly regaining his strength and relearning to walk and talk.

Eventually, he enrolled in college courses at the University of Boston in Massachusetts to earn an associate's degree. After about a year and a half he transferred to Ivy Tech in Muncie, and then to Ball State University for a bachelor's degree. During his time as a student at Ball State, Strong was also a member of multiple local organizations: he worked as the Delaware County Building Commissioner, served on the board of the Human Rights Commission, founded the Fighting Against Drugs and Violence non-profit corporation, and co-chaired the Weed and Seed social outreach program. More recently, in 2017 Strong founded the Enough is Enough movement, which involves gathering community members to walk the streets of Muncie at night to discourage crime. One day, Strong aspires to be the Mayor of Muncie, but there is a long and difficult path before him. He will have to push past the racism that permeates Muncie politics.

My second interviewee, Roland A. Wiley, Jr., flew in from Los Angeles, California. Before our interview, I met Wiley at the Ball State College of Architecture and Planning building for a tour by an acquaintance of mine, Anna Goodman, as the building had changed quite a bit since the last time he had visited campus. He was impressed with much of the technology the architecture program has to offer its students, and shared stories of his time as a student with the students we ran into. He even took time to look at some of Anna's work.

Early on in our interview, I noticed that Wiley's life contrasted greatly with Strong's. He grew up in a predominantly black neighborhood in Indianapolis, but it was very secluded from

the more conflict-ridden black areas of the city. Wiley himself did not become aware of the civil rights movement until he was twelve years old when Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed. Wiley noted that discrimination was rather subtle for him growing up, so much so that some limitations – such as the fact that he was only ever able to go to a nearby amusement park on Wednesdays – did not register as discrimination until years later. This likely also had to do with his growing up in a stable, middle-class neighborhood; right across the street from his home was a good quality recreational park with a swimming pool, tennis court, and golf course that he had constant access to. Wiley explained to me that he was very fortunate not to have experienced the kinds of challenges that can leave emotional scars.

From the age of six years old, Wiley knew he wanted to be an architect. So growing up he was constantly examining buildings and architecture, and playing with toys like Legos. When he graduated from high school, he received a state scholarship that covered all of his tuition, and a loan to cover his room and board. He was accepted into the Ball State architecture program in spring of 1975, while also pledging Kappa Alpha Psi, which made for a very busy semester. After graduating in 1979, he took a job in LA with the Gruen Associates architecture firm. After working there for about five years, he noticed the glass ceiling above him when a senior associate, Norma Skelarie, the first black woman to receive an architecture license in the United States, was passed up for a promotion to vice president of the firm in favor of a white man who was not as experienced as Skelarie. Almost immediately, Wiley began to wrap up his work with Gruen Associates and start up his own firm, RAW Architecture.

Even here Wiley is continuously limited by another glass ceiling. The greatest challenge he's been facing has been in receiving large architecture commissions, as opposed to smaller ones such as remodeling projects. Despite the fact that his firm has been in business for over

thirty years, he is continuing to see younger – and predominantly white – firms growing faster and receiving these big commission projects. One day he hopes to break, or at least crack, this glass ceiling for the next generation to break through.

One area where Wiley and Strong were very similar is in their work in their local communities. In LA, Wiley started up a project called Menformation, a mentorship program that teaches life skills to young men from twelve to eighteen years-old. The program is particularly aimed towards young boys who are growing up without a father figure. Eventually he'd like to expand the organization, but for now he is just working to keep the program going.

After all of our interviews were completed, the team was given another workshop by Michael Szajewski and Brandon Pieczko, this time going over how to prepare our oral history interview transcripts. We were directed to a software that we could upload the audio from our interviews onto, and then type the transcript in the program's text area. The software allowed us to easily slow down, speed up, and pause the audio as needed to help us with the transcribing.

The transcriptions were tedious work. Depending on the interviewee's voice, audio clarity, and the length of the interview, transcriptions could take hours. On a few occasions, despite having been the one conducting the interview, I found myself struggling to understand certain words and phrases in the audio. Hoping that a new ear would understand would I could not, I even called a friend for assistance. Thankfully, both of my interview transcripts came together, just in time for the end of the semester.

Around this time, the team was preparing for the Project Showcase where we would present a short documentary discussing our work over the past semester. To create the

documentary, we gathered soundbites from the interviews that pertained to certain overlapping themes that we had noticed over the weeks of interviews. On one night in particular, I recall meeting fellow teammate Allison Hunt in Burkhardt Building with popcorn and juice boxes to get us through the hours of interviews.

We also conducted short interviews of each other, discussing the importance of the work we were doing and how we felt about it. A small number of soundbites from these interviews were used in the documentary as well.

Finally, the day of the Project Showcase arrived. Community partners; the project interviewees; Ball State students, faculty, and staff; and our friends and family were all invited to join us. Though Roland Wiley was, understandably, unable to fly back to Muncie for the showcase, I was pleased to see that Marwin Strong was able to join us with one of his sons. It was a great feeling to have completed such a project – or nearly complete, as most of us had not yet turned in our finalized transcripts. It was clear from the short documentary that we had recorded amazing stories and accounts, all of which would soon be available on the Ball State University Libraries' Digital Media Repository. Today these interviews can be found at <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/search/collection/BSUAAAlmOrH>, along with interviews from phase one of the project recorded in the spring of 2015.

Participating in the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project has greatly changed the way I view history. I now understand how important it is to seek out other perspectives, particularly those of minorities, rather than just take the perspectives of the majority for granted. Furthermore, it's important not to paint minority communities with the

same brush, as many who do not belong to a given minority group tend to do. I hope that those who read or listen to our interviews from this project take away this understanding as well.



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### **Etc.**

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# Archives and Special Collections

University Libraries



Ball State University  
Bracken Library, Room 210  
Muncie, IN 47304

Phone: 765-285-5078  
FAX: 765-285-8149  
Email: [libarchives@bsu.edu](mailto:libarchives@bsu.edu)

## Ball State University African-American Alumni Oral History Project

Archival Identification:

Interviewer: Charity Munro

Interviewee: Marwin Strong

Videographer: Lauren Hendricks

Interview Supervisor: Michael Wm. Doyle

Date of interview: March 25, 2017

Munro: Hello, my name is Charity Munro. Today's date is March 5—March 25, 2017 and I am interviewing Marwin Strong on the Ball State University campus as a part of Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project. I'd like to start with your childhood, so could you tell me when and where you were born?

Strong: I was born in Muncie, Indiana, at Ball Memorial Hospital, my mother had me on January 2, 1977. I always kinda wondered, you know, why I'm not on the first, but, you know, funny story that my mom always told me that her water broke. She was at a party so she just decided to wait until the next day to have me. So I was born, um, you know, in a low poverty—a low poverty area. My mother had, at first, you know, I was the fourth child, at the time. The next I know were my other sisters and my brothers, so we had eight all together.

[1:00]

But growing up—growing up it wasn't easy, it wasn't an easy lifestyle, but I didn't know until I was really officially poor until I got older. There were roaches and mice, lights being cut off, water being cut off, gas, uh, gas, electric, and all those things being cut off. So myself growing up, it was rough. Um, my mother, she—we didn't see her a lot. Uh, she had to go out there and do the things she had to do to make sure our family be safe so our grandmother—our grandmother Josephine Strong, basically took a hold of us and raised us. So I was always around my mom, always around my mom—my mom used to date different guys that was selling drugs, doing drugs. And I used to see my mom get in fights all the time with these type of men. It really hurt me.

[2:00]

It was a really bad situation that I had to deal with. Uh, but I always really was protecting my mom. It seemed like I was the one that always try to get between my mom and other guys and, um, and so I see my mama, you know, got her face

broke. I was with my mother when she had a nervous breakdown. I was with my mother—when we cried and I always told my mom that everything would be alright. So, growing up in that area my dad—my dad left me at an early age. He moved to Detroit, Michigan, in and out of prison. So I didn't really have a father figure in my life at that time—I love my father dearly now, but at that time, you know, I didn't have nobody to tell me, uh, Marwin, you can be anything you want to be out of life, uh, you can be the best, you can graduate from Ball State University. So I didn't have no role models, I did have nobody to really tell me, you know, that I could be this person I am today. So at that time, when I was growing up, I the things that I've seen.

[3:00]

I used to go and steal for my family, I used to steal, you know, we used to go to Village Pantrys and different things, go to different fruit markets because my fam—my sisters and brothers were hungry. So me and my brother Stevie, he's my older brother, we used to go out and steal and try to feed our family. From candy bars, to—they used—back in the day they used to have bottles where you could raise up a bottle, say, Hey, I got bottles, you'd get ten cents a bottle. So I just—I used to try to make—make ends meet. McDonalds on Madison, years ago, when I was growing up we didn't have nothing to eat, we couldn't even eat McDonalds, we didn't have enough money to eat McDonalds. So we'd just sit over by a bargain box right across the street and wait until McDonalds closed so we'd get—we'd get bags—bags and bags of food that they'd throw out for the night. We used to go home and microwave them, and that's how we ate our fast food.

[4:00]

So, this—in—in that area, in that life, I didn't have the nicest clothes. Like I said we lived in a one bedroom home, I used to have to wear my sister's clothes, and my brother's—my brothers socks, and we had to trade. By the time we had to boil water, we had to boil water from our neighbor's home. Because we didn't have the proper things in life. And it was sad, it was very depressing, it was very emotional, but I always kept a smile on my face. Nobody could see the hurt I had inside of me. So at about ten, I tend to start playing basketball. And that was like another world away from reality, I would always play basketball constantly until the lights came on and I had to run home before my grandmother got hold of me. So those are the things I did at an early age. It wasn't fun, it wasn't fun at all. But at the age of nine years old I was—I was out with some friends.

[5:00]

We'd just come back from Tuhey Pool, they had this place called Ryan's and I didn't have the money, so me and my friend we went ahead and we decided to walk off because we was upset because we didn't have the money. So we saw the ice cream man riding by. We had a butterfly knife at the time and we robbed him, we robbed him of some ice cream, we didn't want the money, we just wanted the

ice cream. So we go up to a pear tree you know, we ate ice cream and came down and the police got us and took us to the detention. The great thing about him was that, I was around him, he was the one that pulled out the knife, but I was around him, and that—they called—I was guilty as charged, too. But he took—he took the rap told my mother, my mother came in she said, just "no, go home, I'm going to tear your back." Then you could have woopin's, you could get woopin's with extension cords, and phones and she had a great aim. So she whipped me and told me—put me on punishment for a long time. So I learned my lesson.

[6:00]

I wasn't charged, the guys took the blame for it, but it kinda, like, gave me a sense like, Hey, you can't do that, you can't—that's the wrong way to go about it, even though—if you're hungry, eat what you've got." So I understand the dynamics of living on pork and beans and hot dogs and my mother she made sure that we—she—had the nicest thing—we didn't have the nicest things but whether she'd done, people would come over, you know, it's—stealing clothes, we get the nice clothes that way. But it just—it wasn't honest. And, I didn't—I'd seen it all and done it all at an early age. Used to go to the Multi Community Center, and there was—I'd always try to find ways to get summer lunches. And that was my childhood, my childhood was really, you know, it wasn't—it wasn't a fun and dandy one.

Munro: Uh, just to clarify, what was your mother's name?

Strong: Martha, Martha Strong.

[7:00]

Munro: And what—I know you mentioned that you and your brother would sometimes steal, but what was your relationship with some of your other siblings?

Strong: Well, we all was tight knitted. I had a sister named Sylvia, I got a sister named Sylvia. They all lived and they all graduated from high school. And that's a blessing by itself. Uh, but my sister Sylvia she was the—she was the breadwinner, she was the—she was the oldest, so she had to grow up early. There was times that she would make sure that we all got up for school—my mother around—my grandma—my mother couldn't come around. She'd make sure we got up for school, she'd make sure that we did what we had to do, so she was a mother of us. And everybody had to listen to my sister, Sylvia. And we still to this day. My sister Melinda, my sister, Melinda she was—she was older than me, she was more of a cunning sneaky type of person. She would always find—she'd venture off into the world to try, just see what life was all about. But then I had a sister. Then there was my brother, Stevie, and my brother Stevie was the one that he—I always looked up to him.

[8:00]

He was always the person that he was a wrestler and he was a strong guy no one messes with—no one messed with you know the stealing clothes we called him “Little Stevie” he’s my—but no one messed with him, no one, no one. And he protected me, he made sure nobody—nobody messed with me even though I could fight on my own but he never, never, let nobody do it because he felt like he had to protect his little brother. And so him and I, we was, you know, we was always around each other. It was only him at that time because he—hey he’s my brother, he is my older brother and I really looked up to him. Then there was me, myself, I was a middle child. Then after that was my sister, Georgia, Georgia Strong. Georgia Strong, her and I we always feuded out, got in to it a lot but I love her to death and I made sure nobody could mess with her but me. Funny thing about when we—when she was first born, [Strong laughs] I kinda bit her finger because I didn’t—I didn’t want her to be born, you know, I don’t want her to be around, because I thought I was going to be the last child.

[9:00]

So I bit her fingers and mama she my tore butt up again. She had—she had a little mole on her—on her thumb from me [Strong laughs] biting her but it—but it’s gone now so it was—so Georgia she’s outspoken. Georgia is more of an outspoken person, she’s more of a person that’ll tell you how she feel, but her heart is so soft and so beautiful and so big. So she had a way about herself. And then I have my brother Michael, I have another little—another brother Michael, we call him Boo. He was always protecting him, just like my brother protecting me, I felt like—I basically raised him. He was always the type of person to wander off, you’d find him in the middle of the night eating cranberry sauce or sweet corn, climbing on cabinets, um, so I always had to tell him to get down. And then we had twins, I got two—I got twin sisters, Michelle and Danielle and they were the last of my mother.

[10:00]

Now they would fight, they was more—that’s as my mother was coming out of alcoholism and different things, she would go and she was coming out. She had a nervous breakdown. So my sisters, uh my sisters, Michelle and Danielle, they was the babies, they were the spoiled little brats, you know but they didn’t fight in a minute, so they’re my little sweeties. So my family is really, really tight knitted. We was always a black sheep of the family. You always the ones that kind of—the ones that don’t go around and, by the grace of God not—we would have been separated. I remember when I was a young kid, right after my birthday. We just, you know, it was Georgia and my sister—my sister Sylvia, and Melinda, and all of us, and my brother Stevie, we was all—it was right after my birthday on January second. And pretty much, you got December twenty-fifth, then you got January first, then you—so I got all the presents, you know?

[11:00]

So what happened one night, I fought with my sister Melinda, we just got a—we just got a new house, it was a rental house, and what she had—she had a newspaper, and you'd light the newspaper, with the newspaper you could blow it out—you could blow it out then you could set it back on fire, and I did it, you know. And I seen her do it and so I'm going to do the same thing, so I did it. Well, little I behold, I threw it in the trash when the side was still lit. It was still lit. And in the meantime, there was a utility room where my mother kept her newspapers at. You know, because we kept newspaper for different reasons. And next thing I know, I looked in the room, the whole house was on fire. So we—everybody got out and right before my mother hit the last step the whole house blew up. So we had to stay—we had to stay with some of—some of the neighbors for the last two months, wait for two months. And then we had to move to California.

[12:00]

While I was in California, at the time I actually—I went to an elementary school called Dover, Dover Elementary. And I was—I was out and having a good time, and all my friends left—they had a thing called foosball. Foosball, when you hit it, in California, you know, hey I'm in California, man, it's beautiful up there. I been through the earthquakes and everything but this particular time I was—I was out there by myself. Back in those days they had—for play grounds they had tires, you could put tires together, they had different things they'd put tires together. I'm out here just playing by myself. Well some Crips and Bloods always feuded, that is when it was back in the early eighties, the Crips and Bloods were feuding. So some Crips came, the Crips came and there were some Bloods. The Bloods was already there, and they didn't know I was there. Well, the Crips end up shooting the guy, I mean, the Bloods end up shooting this guy, man, in the head, oh probably about sixteen times, and I seen it. I seen it with my own eyes.

[13:00]

So at the time I'm hiding—I'm hiding—I'm hiding, you know, they laughing like, Man, watch him just jump, watch him just jump, watch him, you know, shoot him again. So they were looking like it was a play thing. They thought, like, this is a body. I'm a young guy, I'm a young guy, I'm probably about ten, about ten—about ten years old, so at the time—at the time I got an opportunity I ran. I ran across highways, and you run in California you get—you get tickets for jaywalking, you know, and I ran across highways and I hurdle—and ran upstairs and my mother said "what's wrong with you?" and I said "mom, I'm scared" and I'm just kinda nervous, you know, because I'm like, man, they going to kill me because. So now I hear a knock on the door, when I hear a knock on the door it was—it was some Bloods and said, Hey, can your son come out and play? And my mother said "well, he can't come out to play because you've got to ask his daddy can he come—come out and play." And I was so scared that day, you know, and my mind is still imagining—can still see the face of that young man taking his last breath.

[14:00]

And I'm learning this stuff at eleven years—eleven, ten, eleven years old. And so after that my mother and my grandmother wants to come back home. We came back home to Muncie, Indiana.

Munro: How did it feel—that initial move to California, did you have friends that you left behind or—

Strong: Well, I left a lot of friends, I'm from here. Um, you know, a lot of friends where I lived that—my mother always wanted to make sure that we lived on the outskirts, but I don't know, why I never asked her why. But we always end up at my grandmother's house. My grandmother lived in the projects Muncie, the homeless call Millennium place now. So we was always around my grandmother, we was always staying around her. But when we left my heart was broken. I had family—I got family—I have family in California, my Aunt May, my cousin La'Monte my cousin Monica, my cousin Lair she was married to—call him Muff, we call him Muff McCoy.

[15:00]

So we was always around but my mother just wanted to leave and have new scenery. She was tired of the seeing what was going on in Muncie, and different types of things so she just wanted another life. So it was—it was rough, I mean, it was really horrible, and I was sad, because I didn't know, I mean, all my friends was—that's all we knew was in the [unintelligible]. I didn't know what California was, but I miss it, I definitely miss it. But I really missed my friends at that time.

[16:00]

Munro: Do you feel that, I guess, as a child when—did you feel that they were, well-integrated? Or were they more of a—not a black populated school, that's—

Strong: Well yeah, it was an inner-city school, pretty much inner-city it was a mix, but you could always tell—you could always tell, you know, the differences with the different teachers. You could tell who's the preppy guy that had a mother and a father, maybe doctors, from a Caucasian standpoint. And then you could also see, from African American standpoint whose mother worked [unintelligible] and then here you got me and other friend, that didn't have nothing. So we did—we ca—we couldn't go to Shedtoun, Shedtoun is a place where it was all Caucasian place, you couldn't go across the tracks. And they couldn't come to—on the south side of town, they couldn't come over where we was at neither.

[17:00]

There was a lot of fights, a lot, you know, we got jumped, and they got jumped too, so it was still prejudice still going on because if you looked at the whole situation that—at that time can have what other Caucasian kids had, you know?



We couldn't be the honors students, we were always the dumb little niggers, running around here, and we never will amount to nothing, we're going to go to prison, so we hear those things from different types of teachers at that time. But you had some beautiful ones too, you had some great teachers, and you also had great Caucasian males, as well and females. Yeah so I had good African Americans, males and females, but pretty much you could still see the stigma of race and still the lingering around different schools and around Muncie.

Munro: Are there any teachers that had a significantly prom—or positive influence on you that still stick with you today?

[18:00]

Strong: Well, I could—I could be honest with you, it's three that stick out. It's two elementary, a guy named Mr. Wilson. Mr. Wilson he was with the Washington Carver, he's actually my coach. I was a small kid I was about like probably like 4'3", but I was the most fastest kid and he saw fit to me. He was probably the only one that said "Marwin you can be anything, the sky's the limit for you." And then you have after that—oh my goodness—the greatest is, I say, too, the greatest person in my life was a guy by the name of Coach Francis Lafferty, He was the one that really stuck with me back then until the day that he passed away. I'll never forget there was one day I was in seventh grade, it was at basketball tryouts.

[19:00]

I had some holey shoes, some shoes that they, you know, slipped and slide, I got them from Payless. It was from Protext they was all white, and what happened was I played basketball that day, that was the last time on basketball. I think I did pretty well, but over the school day I ended up—I ended up spit—you know, doing spit balls, that when you roll them up and do [spit noise] and spit them out of a straw, well, I hit a student, you know, and I hit a student a couple times and he went and I—and told. And I dunno who he told but I was so scared that night I said "I might not make the basketball team" but then I end up waking up late, so back then they—they put—they put the tryouts—they put your tryouts of who made the basketball team on the gym, but then after that, I didn't—I didn't—I couldn't see it because I came late, so I'm in class like man did I make the team? Did I make the team? So nobody told me I made the team, and then I got a pass. When I got a pass, they called me down to the office now I'm thinking it's because I did a spit ball.

[20:00]

I thought, Man I'm about to get into trouble I might not make the basketball team. Because basketball was my way away from trouble, my way away from stress. I put it all on the floor, everything, and then that was a reality—a fantasy away from reality I could say. And that's all I knew I just wanted to play basketball, I wanted to get my mind off the things I was going through at home, I want to get

my mind off the things I've got to go home to. So after a time I'm just sitting down there and I'm in the office, and next I know a big Caucasian guy, you know, he said "Mar, Mar," I said "yes sir" I don't know who this guy is, he is about 6—about 6'3", I'm like wow who is this guy, he's like "I'm Coach Lafferty," I said "how are you doing?" you know and I'm thinking, Man I'm scared, sometimes you—butterflies you scared. And I'm like, Man what's going on?

[21:00]

He said, "well, I want to say the shoes you had on yesterday, I don't see how you did it, you slip and slide all through my tryouts," he said "I want to give you a pass and I've talked you the principal, I've talked to your mom, I want to give you a pass and go down to Rex," Rex store that was downtown Muncie, "and buy you some brand new tennis shoes. And my eyes like wow, he like "yeah, because to be on my basketball team you can't—you can't be wearing shoes like this on my basketball team." So we go down to Rex, he bought me some brand new Dr. J's, all leather, I can look at them right now, and they was awesome, man. And all through life, every year from seventh grade all the way to—I was a senior in high school, he bought me shoes every year. You know, and him—and he was the most pinnacle person in my life, he was my mentor, he would be till the day he died, of last year.

[22:00]

Munro: Um, so uh, you graduated high school in '95—

Strong: Correct—

Munro: Correct? And then continuing with basketball, you then by '98 you were participating in a summer program?

Strong: Yes so what happened then was from '95, '95 to '9—'95 to '98, at the time I didn't have any children at that time and I was just out there, just—being a product of my environment, selling drugs, partying. I had to survive, you know that was the survival where—I seen my other friends selling drugs and they had nice clothes and had nice cars, and I want the same thing, so I was just a product of my environment, I just, I never arrived nobody, I never broke into anyone's house. But I was very cunning, I was a very—a very persuasive guy.

[23:00]

I knew how to talk to people, I knew how to have them buy my product I sold marijuana, I sold everything, I didn't sell crack. I didn't sell the—different thing, but I sold just enough where I won't—like, I used to have a mindset, Okay if I sell marijuana, if I get caught, I have a misdemeanor, now if I sell cocaine, I know cocaine is a felony, so I always had that mind, Hey, like, okay I'm going to sell this—I'm going to sell this product here, I'm going to sell pills. I won't get in a lot of trouble, I might get probation, that's just the way I thought. But at the same

time I'm still—I'm still constantly just, you know, selling drugs, and chasing at the women, and go partying and at the party—at the party—but I still play basketball—I still play basketball. After I graduated, I didn't—I want to go to college, I tried to go to Vincennes, for about, like, probably two weeks, but I got homesick. Um, I had my sister come and get me, and I start selling drugs. Other friends around me they selling drugs.

[24:00]

So by that time I was—I was heavy in the drug trade, you know, and I knew how to do those things, at the same time I was still playing basketball. So if time permit, I'm going to different places. I'm still selling drugs, I'm getting like MVPs in different states, play with guys, Bonzie Wells, and Chandler Thompson, Boston Alumni, Jay Edwards from IU, Charles Smith. I play with a lot of guys that already was on their way to NBA, always on the overseas playing basketball, so I just—I just constantly just started doing that, so I never forget it, year 1998, I was—because every year was a pro—was pro-summer leagues, they was pros, I wasn't—I was still just this kid that they'd call because they know I'm good enough to play nobody knew nothing about me. They knew I was just a guy, you know, off the block, but they knew I could play.

[25:00]

So I'm playing with all these multi-millionaire guys man here I am, I'm this drug dealer, but I'm getting MVPs, and I'm getting different things—I'm getting different kinds of—kinds of accolades, so I didn't know nothing about, I wanted to go to the NBA but here we go again nobody told me I could be this person. I was still lost, my daddy he was still in Detroit, MI. Everybody know me as this big weed dealer, so at the time I just, so in the year 1998—but it was 1998 to 1999, you know, recollect my mind, I remember that, I believe, University of Kentucky won the state champion ship the NCAA in 1998, uh, so the guys came, like, they came to Indianapolis, Indiana to watch in the park—watch in the park in an absolute real huge you had basketball players all over the world coming to this park, you know, I mean from overseas, to the NBA the—the NBADL, you know, the CBA.

[26:00]

I mean, and here I am, lil' ol' Marwin, you know, so in the championship game I saw Bonzi, uh, Chandler Thompson, man, I mean it was like, a lot of—Jay Edwards was on that team from IU and it going to be, and at—and when we played against—we played against guys from University of Kentucky, they won the championship and I'm looking at these guys like, whoa, like, I'm playing against these guys, then my mind has so much of a killer instinct what I—what that means, I s—I wanted—I wanted to do them so bad. So they shaking all these guys hands and, Hey, how you doing today? And, What's up? and I'm starting at that time so they like—they looked at me like, Hey, give me a little fist bump, so

I'm like, they're not really acknowledging me. So I got mad, I got angry, I'm like—I'm about—I'm about to put it on now. So I end up getting 50 points and 23 rebounds and get the MVP of that tournament, and that was my lineup of the year.

[27:00]

After that different cultures from all over the world was coming at me asking, Do I play college basketball? I said no. I got invited to a USBL league, played up there, I mean, went up there and played, you know, made the final cut, but I wanted to continue to play the hustle game. I wanted to play call fire stalls I got invited to Indiana State University. Uh, and, I mean, I was ballin', I was playing so hard. It's people from University of Florida, University of Miami, Ohio, you know, guys from North Carolina State, you know I was going to be the MVP the next day but I left that next night, because I wanted to go party with my friends, because nobody told me I could be anything I wanted to be out of life. To this day I regret it—and today I regret it to this day that, hey, if I could've just stayed at that night, if I would just stuck to basketball, if I could've just hang around.

[28:00]

Now one of my guys, Bonzi Wells, he always told me, cause him—when he was a freshman so I'm like—I used to stay with them after at Ball State when he went to school here he asked me “Man, Marwin, you need to stop, you need to stop hanging around the boys man, you need—you had your talent. You know, Bonzi he was on his way, uh, you know, but he always encouraged me to make sure that we—he's like family to me, he always told me, “Man, you could be anything you want to—stop hanging with them dudes, man.” But, you know, I was so deep into it, I didn't know, I di—the glamorous life, delusional life that I had and plus I had to survive. From 19—from 1995 at the time I had a son, I had a son and I miss him [unintelligible] Dalvin. Dalvin is a beautiful young guy, man, he's a great, great young man good kid. And then the year after that, probably about six months after that, after he was born I had my daughter Melea. By that time, in '99, yeah it was happening all—this all happened in '99, so, at '99 I was on my way to I was going to go try out for basketball for NBA.

[29:00]

I was going to try out for the basketball and—and this [unintelligible] and I was going to try out and I decided to go to a party. I wanted to go kick it, have a good time, and I'm just doing the normal thing I do. Had all the women, had all the money, had a nice car, a yellow Cadillac, canary yellow color paint Cadillac, triple gold bars. And I ridding—so I was the man, I mean, I was the man playing basketball, I was the man that was the drug dealer, I had all the girls, had all the money I wanted, my kids is great, and then that night was the most tragic day of my life. Some guys poisoned me, and at that time when I—when I drunk it, they were like Man, die slow. But I think it's the music, you know, I'm listening to Hot Boys, and I'm just—Hey man, die slow, I'm just. Next I know—when you drink

alcohol you have a sensation that leaves you, but this time it just stayed in my chest for days and days and days and I'm thinking like, Man what the world happened to me?

[30:00]

What's going on? My whole body—slept with the wrong girl? God I don't want to have AIDS, so please don't—please don't—that when things—all these things in my mind, like, What did I do? Well iodine was going all through my body. I start having different things like ringworms all over my hands and my hair starts falling out, I start losing weight rapidly, I couldn't eat anything. My mother—the last thing I know my mother found me in the bathroom having grandma seizures. They said I was in a coma for a month, I was in a coma for a month, my mother and them said that the doctors came in said, This young boy about to die. They was takin' tubes off of me, get the obituary laid out. This kid he's just failing—all his organs is failing, and he's got a leakage in his brain, had to drain the liquids out of the left side of my brain and—because it was bleeding, he's about to die.

[31:00]

I went to several hospitals before all this stuff happened. I went to IU, I went to St. Johns Hospital, and they say just a little common cold, mono, they said something, We don't know what's going on. So they always just give me antibiotics and send me back home. And then my brother he just shook me, and he just pick me up, I was—I weigh—I had to weigh about like, one hundred and, like, twenty-three pounds. He picked me up and took me to the hospital, and I got back out, got back at the hospital and I stayed there for a couple days and—me and my mother, she got into a little feud and—we got into a little, small, little feud and whatnot. I stayed with my sister that night, I came back home to get my stuff, if I could live with my sister, and that's when she found me in the bathroom having the grandma seizures. That's the only thing I remember, I remember nothing else after that. I just remember me waking up with tubes in me and trake in my neck, a PEG tube in my stomach, I didn't know what was in my stomach a PEG tube or something.

[32:00]

They got to feed you, nutrition to feed you, I couldn't eat, I couldn't swallow, I really knew—I didn't know who was what, I didn't know who was who at that time, I didn't know the names of people, and I tried to run out of the hospital several times because I didn't know. I didn't know how to walk, the doctors came in say, you know, This young man he gon—he won't be able to walk again, he won't be able to talk again, he won't be able to do this and do that. He have—he has a leakage in the brain, they said—they diagnosed me with that I had a thing called lupus, said I that I had a thing systematic lupus, that they tried to say that I had—they put me on over twenty-three pills, seventeen to twenty-three pills. So at that time I'm in a hospital and I'm thinking like, Whoa, like, man, this—people

came and told me what happened to me, they did—they did a chemo therapy on me, they did ten chemo therapies for my kidneys.

[33:00]

If I couldn't have my kidney function back, what was going to happen, I was going to be on dialysis for the rest of my life. So I can't drink caffeine, I've got to drink water and juice, and so I haven't drunk caffeine or anything for over seventeen years. Um, so it was—that was the lowest point in my life, I almost died.

Munro: Did you ever find out who had spiked your drink?

Strong: Well I did, speculations, people said it wasn't them, you know, and the game—and the bottom to the game. People came and told me, but you know at the same time I kinda thank them for doing that—happen to me, how bad it was, but you know, when you—when you in the drug game there's no bottom to the game. Anything could happen, guys rob you, kill you, so they can be on top. You know, so, it's always—it's just—you got—you've got to watch out for the police, you've got to watch out for people from robbing you.

[34:00]

Uh, so you just part of the game, just part of the whole nature. And that's what I firmly believe. I tell people today, having me been a mentor to people, sp—me I speaking all around the world, there's only two ways to the game either dead or in prison. I never seen nobody get a 401K, uh after selling drugs.

Munro: A Ball State Daily Article from April of 2008 quoted you as saying that "by the grace of God he brought you back,"

Strong: Yes—

Munro: Uh, it's not uncommon for people to have a new or renewed faith in God after having such close encounters. Were you very religious before this event?

Strong: I didn't—I didn't care nothing care nothing about God, I didn't know him, I went—I went—when I was little, a church called Grace Baptist Church, used to come get us in a white bus, more of an outreach thing to try to help people out so.

[35:00]

Only time I went to Grace Baptist is because when you got quiet you get a dollar. Can't say nothing. Um, I didn't come from a faith based home, our family's hustlers, and thieves and people who went to prison, people that kill people. So I wasn't raised in an environment where religion was really not a big issue. I went to church on Easter, uh, and that's the common thing to do, so I wasn't—I wasn't too much, I didn't care too much about God, God wasn't my source. I just, either I

lived or I died, you know, and that's how it was. Because I lived a life of hopelessness, you know, of statistical—and it always a statistic thing for being a black man A lot of us don't live to the age of twenty-two years old. Especially where I come from. A friend, they said he committed suicide, I was with him at least a couple hours without drinking.

[36:00]

One of my best friends died. And so people around me always died, but I didn't know nothing. I just knew when I was thirteen I got baptized, but I didn't have—I just—I wanted to change I was trying to find a way out, but demons was just all around me, so I didn't—I didn't care nothing about God. Um, but I tell you what, when I—when I got—when I got sick, when all that stuff happened to me and I got to hospital, when I was in the hospital still, I looked at the Bible and I started reading it. So I basically taught myself about the word. I started having encounters with God, Him speaking to me and telling me "Marwin there's another way" I started having dreams and visuals and people telling me you know, I mean Him and I just.

[37:00]

I was in the hospital for two years, time my mother and my sister never could come they had blizzards. Indiana you can't—you have blizzards and stuff like that. So I didn't trust the nurses, I didn't trust nobody so how I went to school—how I went to sleep, I just prayed Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, next time it was five o'clock in the morning said, Marwin we need to take your blood. So I started building my faith up, you know. I wouldn't consider myself as a religious person, but spiritual, a spiritual being. You know, when you say the word "religion," religion could mean so many ways. But I'm a spiritual—I'm more of a spiritual guy.

Munro: So when you got—after your two years of being in the hospital is that when you were finally—were you able to walk and talk and do all that—

Strong: Well—

Munro: —by the end of that two years?

Strong: Yeah, yeah, well I—when I was in the hospital, I went—I went to occupational therapy, speech therapy.

[38:00]

A lot of people laughing right now cause I say—at the time I speak pop—real popular, no proper. And in that time you'll find Ebonics is coming out of me. Uh, Ebonics is the slang words, so it was a good thing I could speak both languages now [Strong laughs] you understand?

Munro: Mm—hmm.

Strong: Proper English. When I could be around my home boys, I could talk their language, so it—I've got like a diverse type of mentality. But I went through all those therapies, going through physical therapy I had to be strong with it because many times I wanted to give up, I just prayed—I just wanted to die because it was so much pain, agony that I had to go through then I started being bad on myself, I started thinking down on myself, so at the time of that phone call from my uncle. My uncle he went to Brandeis University, he coached there for many, many years in Boston, and him and this guy was talking Coach Charlie Tutus from UMass Boston.

[39:00]

And I—my uncle, I talked to him—I said, “uncle,” I said “I just want to find another way, when I get out of the hospital.” And my uncle, he said “Marwin just write me a letter.” Now when you write a letter you can just get all of the details about how you want to write a letter, it gives you all the viewpoints. Me just saying it—he wanted me to write it. So I wrote him a letter, and he asked “What do you want to do for the rest of your life?” And when I did and he got the letter, he got in con—contact with a guy Charlie Titus, Charlie Titus he called me at the hospital, and said he want to come—he want to come see me play basketball in July. So what I did—I couldn’t walk. He said “how much do you weigh?” I said “I weigh about 190, man, I’m looking,” At that time I’m weighing 123, I’m in the hospital, so I just call the guy for the therapy and I said “I want to go back down there, I’m not—I’m about to try out in July” so I started having that faith I started building myself up, I started running the water I started doing all kinds of stuff man, you know, like, “Well, what is wrong with you, dude?”

[40:00]

And I'm like "no man I've really, really got to get this right" so thi—so it gave me a hope for—because I always wanted to play college basketball, I never had an opportunity, so that June—that June I got out of the hospital about January—about January eleventh. That June I go up there, uh, play basketball, after I got out of the hospital, and I made the basketball team. And that's—that was like, Yes. Because I wanted to change, I didn't want to leave the hospital and go back to the—I met a crossroad in my life, Do you want to go out here, or do you want to change for your kids? My kids never seen me smoke or drink. I show them a picture right now and they're like, Dad that can't be you. With guns in my hands, saggy pants on, all nice, FUBU clothes, you know, hanging with gangsters, so I wanted to change for my kids, as well. So I just want—and ever since them, there's my life, it's just, yep, so when I got out of the hospital that's what happened.

[41:00]



Munro: For the record, what was your uncle's name?

Strong: Wallace Johnson.

Munro: Wallace Johnson. So after getting out of the hospital then you want to the University of Massachusetts?

Strong: In Boston, UMass—

Munro: Yes.

Strong: Boston, yes.

Munro: And you were only there for two years.

Strong: Well I was there—I was there probably shorter than that—

Munro: Ah.

Strong: Yeah, I was there in and out there, the reason why I was there because I played—I played basketball there and it was fun. But the main thing I—my son called me, probably about five in the morning, he was telling me, cause I always been in a relationship with my kids at an early age, and he was like, "Dad, nobody's home, I need you to come home." And, I mean, these are my babies, man, I think mom was around, she probably went and parked her car, I don't know.

[42:00]

Uh, but I wanted, of course—of course to come home, and my coach, Charlie, it was the middle of the season I said, "I've got to come home, man, I got kids, man, I've got to get custody of my kids." You know, and at that time, I'm about, like, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five, and I was like, Wow, I've got to get home, you know, and I've got to—I've got to take care of my kids, and he said, "Marwin, your kids are your main priority, but just do me a favor, son, when you go home, make sure you get a degree." I said, "You bet, you bet I am." So flew me back home, I got custody of my son, mother she went to Atlanta, and that was a pride in my life, Hey I did it. I want to school, I played basketball up there, and I came home. Now when I came home it's funny because the same place, my first job I—I got back home, I worked for a place called Muncie Reception and Diagnostic Center.

[43:00]

I worked there for probably about—probably about five months, Coach Francis Lafferty, he hooked me up for the job there. He always was—him and I, at that time, he never—he never gave up on me. And I mean, the money, the amount of money that he blessed me with is just like—and always tell me, "Mar, Mar you've got to go there, you've got to go to school, get an education—get an education, you

get that associates degree, you get that bachelors, hopefully you can move up get your scholarship I know what you've been through." So he was a father figure to me, through it all, I miss him to this day. I could always call him about anything, all types of nights. Now here we go we got two different races, we've got African American, he's a Caucasian, and it showed me from what I come from that heart has no color.

[44:00]

He was there because he seen something in me that I didn't see. I didn't have nobody to tell me "I'm proud of you." He always would call me, check on me. So he gave me the job at Muncie Reception and Diagnostic Center, because he didn't want me to back out in the drug gang. So I started working there. I had to get laid off in the six month period because I didn't have a license. At that time, I was on—I was on Social Security, they said I was totally unable to walk again, quote unquote what the paper says. So they put me on Social Security, but I don't want to get on Social Security, I don't want to wait for \$525 a month I wanted a job. So at the time I lived in Parkview Apartments. Parkview Apartments is another place where I lived there—where my mother lived at when I was in high school. But it was a real drug infested area. It was a place where I sold drugs at, the same place I did all my dirt at, my drug—all my dirt. And there was a job that was opening that a lady, she just left, I dunno if she quit.

[45:00]

But there was an opening now that was open and I'm lying in bed, they said, man, I had to take my brother Tyron, I got another brother named Tyron on my dad's side, he had to go up there, he wanted to get a home at—at—a home in Parkview, you know. And he was a single parent man, he wanted to get custody of his kids as well, and he was [unintelligible] I went with him—I went—I went in and helped him out. And a friend of mine, she said "Marwin, Parkview Apartments, the public housing manager position is wide open—it's open. Why don't you try—why don't you try for it?" I'm like, "Man, what am I going to put on my resume? What am I going to put on my—that I was a drug dealer? That I was going to be a drug dealer? Whatcha going to put on there?" "Naw Marwin I'll help you out, I'll help you get the job, they need—they need strong men like you to turn their life around." You know, so I applied, and I got the job. And the guy said, and the manager, his name was Charlie, well, he said "Marwin, I'm going to hire you on your—on the—on the account that you're learning about it, cause I was honest with him I'm an honest man.

[46:00]

He said "I'm hiring you because you can change this community around, we need a male figure, that been there done that, and that can change. I can help you with that, I—I can help you with your certificates, I need somebody out there." At that time, I think they had about—it was a sixty-four family complex, so there was

only about sixteen families there, at the time I got in there. I had an opportunity to talk to a lot of drug dealers that still on the block, I said "I got the job, I need you to get them off the block, man, because I've got to feed my family now, no disrespect to y'all." Next time—probably about two months' time, the whole Parkview complex was filled up with people. And—and I—and h—that—after that it was—it was rollin' after that, yeah so, that's what happened.

Munro: Ah, so when you got—was it during this time then that you were also attending, Ivy Tech and Ball State?

[47:00]

Strong: Yep, well I was t—it was Ivy Tech when I got back—when I got back I talked to my coach Francis Lafferty, and I told him. And he said, "Mar, continue your education, I know that you want to go back to UMass Boston but at this time it's not about that, you're older now." He had some reality, you know, "You won't be going to the NBA." He just really—he just "you should play basketball, but now it's time to help your son and your daughter." Uh, you know, I said, "Okay," I said, "Okay." So I went to Ivy Tech, I was on commercials with them, they started putting me on billboards all around the state of Indiana. I—you still find billboards of me, way back then, "Ivy Tech is my Community College," so I said—all around the state of Indiana. And I majored in criminal justice, lot of people liked me, I was just always this guy that—honest guy. But I hated math, math was one of my worst, it's like Super—it's like Kryptonite to Superman. Math was not one of my strong points so I failed math like three times, and I hate it—I hate it.

[48:00]

So my last year—my last year there when I'm about to graduate, a lady came to me she said "Marwin, have you talk—have you thought about going to Ball State?" I'm like "What?" And she was like, "Yeah, Ball State." I'm like, Well, Ball State, where I come from, is like a whole nother city, in the inner-city. Ball State is like, like you're living in a whole nother—that's a big deal to me, you're talking about Ball State University? No, we're talking about Ball State University. No, we ain't talking about no little, like, Indiana Ivy Tech. I be like, "Yeah, I'd love to go there." She said "Well, we got a thing called a life's test program up there, we going to help you with your math, but, you know, one thing, good thing about Ivy Tech is that you can go as a second semester junior." I'm like, "Man, you've got to be kidding me, man. No, you lyin'." They like, Marwin, we're serious, man, you've got to pass this math. So I passed the math, you know, but I still had a couple more credits to go so at the time I applied for U—I applied for Ball State.

[49:00]

And I took classes there, and then I took classes here, cause I only had a couple classes at Ivy Tech I had to take, and then I graduated—I graduate that May. So that August I came here to Ball State so I would take a couple classes, but I'll still

take a class here so I took two classes—I think they were world history class, where they talk about the Ice Ages and, ice, and all that and then I took like a, I think—I believe it was like a law intro. I had to take another intro to criminal justice class here. But my main course I wanted to take here was criminal justice, that's what I was going to school for. But what happened was that, I had some other class I had to do, so I changed at the last semester—at the last—like so like the last semester, I changed to general studies. And the reason I changed to general studies is because I wanted to have a—I wanted to have—they said "Marwin, if you go have a criminal justice degree you've got to go another semester."

[50:00]

I'm like, "Man, I'm too close," I said, "what do I've got to do to get out of here?" At that time I'm burnt out, you know, I'm just—I'm like, "Man, what do I need?" They said, Well if you go to general studies, at least you have a minor in sociology because you took some sociology classes, and you took a lot of criminal justice classes, you already have your associates degree, so you take two minors and you'll get out of here with a general studies" and I'm like [smack] "yeah let's do this" and so I'm like "man" and they have—I took some cyber classes, I got a degree in cyber-criminal justice, and then I had to go to summer school, and I graduated. And I graduate.

Munro: Uh, during this—or during your time at Ball State you were also working as the Delaware County Building Commissioner?

[51:00]

Strong: Yes I was—yes I was—I was Delaware County Building Commissioner, at that time, it was kinda crazy, because I worked at the—at the Muncie Housing Authority. I was there for three or four years, and I'm just like "I'm good," I'm like "I got it," I got all kind of accolades, I'm a nat—I'm a national public housing manager, I got—I got that certificate—I got that certificate at the Muncie Housing Authority, and I'm just like, Hey, like, that's what I'm going to do. But a guy by the name of Bing Crosby, Big Crosby was the detective, and he would watch me. But at the last, like—like six months, I don't know—I don't know who this guy was. I didn't know who he was, where he come from, what he did, so I was just like, "Hey, we better clean your house, get a certificate for the housing authority, and he, um, he called me—I came back, and he called me, said, "Hey Marwin, you may not know who I am, but [unintelligible] Judge Voorhees.

[52:00]

Judge Voorhees, she's a circle one judge. Judge Voorhees is also Francis Lafferty's daughter, so I'm like real connected with all of them. "He brought your name up, a guy by the name of John Brook, um, he came to ask" and said, man, he asked, Judge—Judge Voorhees, Madame Voorhees, he asked her who could he

pick to be a good pub—building commissioner at the time, he's—because all the other building commissioners they was pretty much butt holes, they don't know how—if you know what a building commissioner is, it's an inspector, you inspect houses, you look at different things I got—I was a public housing manager, and I did—I always—[unintelligible] came in and—cause that's when all fun and [unintelligible] I seen so many times they fought us because I think, Parkview Apartments was one of the oldest—Parkview—buildings in Muncie, out there.

[53:00]

So we always got dinged we always got failed because—we couldn't fix, like, different sidewalks the egresses. So I'm like, man, [smack] I'm getting tired of us, man, of getting dinged so next—so—he knew about me. He called me in, and, and John Brook, John Brook, he's a lawyer, another one of my great mentors. I did not know it was going to be a political job, though, at all, like, I'm like, Whoa, like. So gave me more money, and I was the first African American Delaware County Building Commissioner. And I was excited, but you have some up and downs and merry-go-rounds in that job too, me being African American in my neighborhood and [unintelligible] county.

Munro: I also understand you were the youngest at—at least at that time, you'd been the youngest to receive that position.

Strong: Correct, correct, yeah.

Munro: Before going too far—too much farther, just to clarify, what years were you attending Ball State University?

[54:00]

Strong: Oh man, it had to be, man, I know graduated probably about 2011, I think, don't quote me on it but—but I, um, but my mind, I know I went there—I came here for two years, cause I graduated 2009, from Ball—from Ivy Tech, so I had to be going back in 2009 to 2011. Yeah so I'm most—pretty much in that year, around that time, I ain't look at my transcripts [Strong laughs] yeah.

Munro: That's alright.

Strong: Yeah [Strong laughs]

Munro: [Munro clears throat] excuse me. So at one point you were also the Human—the President of the Human Right's Commission and co-chair for the Weed and Seed program?

Strong: Yes I was, yeah, it was funny how that happened, man, because I was [unintelligible] start the building commissioner, and they had different boards they need to put you on and the board I was put on was through city council—city council at that time I learned more about politics.

[55:00]

I found out that my Uncle Albert Johnson, he was the first African American city councilman at large at that time years ago. I didn't know this until I understanding my dynamics how important it is for African Americans to be in Politics. And I started understanding the dynamics I started—me working at the county, at the county, I had—I been called nigger, and I been called different things so, but that didn't affect me because I know who I was. I know who I was, and, they appointed me to be the—work on the board for the Human Rights Commission. And at that time, every year and then they appointed me be the President of the board, of the Human Rights Commission I'm like, Whoa, like, this is—this is cool so, a lot of people, man, that we hired in, Yvonne Thompson, right now is—we—I was one of the ones that had an opportunity of getting her hired.

[56:00]

I was on the hiring board to help c—everything goes to us, of the board not the mayor. And then we had a thing—I had a corporation I started called Fighting Against Drugs and Violence. In 2007 I was Star Press Person of the Year, and they said, Man, Marwin be a great person to really, really implement—we doing this Weed and Seed program so we would like him to be one of the co-chairs of the Seed Side, you know, along those other people to formulate a five year plan and—and get a grant for one million dollars for Weed and Seed out the community. So that was pretty cool, I mean, I really like that.

Munro: How did you juggle all of that, you've—you've got three—was this also when you were at the apartment, or working—

Strong: Yeah—

Munro: —with the apartment? So you have, in a sense, four jobs and you're a student at the same time.

Strong: Yeah.

Munro: How on earth did you juggle all that?

[57:00]

Strong: The main thing I prided myself—it goes back when I was in the hospital, and I prayed to—I said, "Lord, If you just heal me, man, I'll serve you all the days of my life." I was just excited just to be walking again, talking again, I was excited, man, like, man, like, a new life—it was like a new life to me. Everything was real I was vibrant I was—I was energetic, cause now I'm not drinking, I'm not smoking, I don't gotta watch my back. All my guy's their going to prison or jail I'm warning them man quit what you're doing I've got an opportunity with the police department that—they trusting me. They said, Man, go talk to these—your young brother, go talk to your friends let them know, man we—if they don't stop

doing what they're doing we're going to get them. So now I'm just—the name just started—Marwin Strong, the name just started—they start asking me to get on different boards, and th—through networking. And to everything I say, "yeah, yeah, yeah" and I'm kinda excited. I was so energetic about that, because here I am, I'm starting a brand new life—a brand new life so I wanted everything.

[58:00]

And then I'm juggling school, I also had **to worry about** going to school and getting an education and I'm at Ivy Tech, loving that, and then I got an opportunity to go to Ball State, I'm loving that. I'm like, Wow, like, man, this is perfect, and then at the same time I was married—I was married at the time, had two other beautiful kids, Zion and Samara, mother name was Shelly Harper, at the time, Shelly Strong, her name was Shelly Harper at the time, and so she was a great—she never had to work, she was at home with the kids, she supported many things that we did. And then we, we ended up getting divorced, so things happened I wouldn't—I don't want to talk about, but we ended up getting divorced. So here I go again, a young man, that lived at the bottom, goes up to climb next thing [smack] my family broken again.

[59:00]

You know, so I had to juggle all this, but I'm still into juggling because I kept my mind off, here we go again, I was trying to keep my mind off the things I was struggling with, and the same thing with basketball. Now wow this is the lowest point of my life, now I've got to go back to this—I've got to go by myself and look at things in this nature. I got—people talking about me, you know, saying it was my fault. I'm in church at the time, I'm a deacon at the church, and church people talking about me, people in the county building. I'm going and then I lost my job—lost my job for the county, I had to go through different things, the secretary call me back bottom drop had racism going in that area of my life. We did—there were lawsuits, I had to go through lawsuits, they set out a court.

[1:00:00]

And—but I'm still just like, still going to [unintelligible] still going to school, nobody knows that Marwin is going through this situation. And what—the time for that—the time—for that time, I when I get down, when I got down I just felt bad about myself. I was always reflecting about the faith that I had when I was in the hospital and a small voice said "Marwin, you, you got through—you almost died young man" now the voice situation you deal with now, losing the job, it's just nothing. So I always had that strong face so I const—constantly kept going no matter what adversary I went through. I always kept that faith, man, said you know what I—it's going to come to pass, I'm going to be alright. It's going a better life after this. Any time I go through this day, I go through my lowest points I always go back, "Marwin you almost died, this is nothing."

[1:01:00]

And I just get up and just keep on going. So I stayed in and juggled through all that, I stayed in and juggled and I was happy and I was excited, and any time you go through adversity, and anytime you try to change something you're always going to have a person, you're always going to have a resistance, and I was just meant—my whole life, I'm forty years, now, but my whole life I always—for what I been through myself living where I live, that—to this day I always go through it, and I always deal with it. I never worry about me killing myself, I never been too stressed out, I always know there be a better day if I just don't give up.

Munro: I'd like to understand better what the—what exactly the Human Rights Commission is.

Strong: Okay, the Human Right's Commission is that we get with—we get with different type of civil cases, as far as, like, we feel discriminated, from housing discrimination to job discrimination to, um, gender discrimination.

[1:02:00]

Just for instance, say if you go to try to find your job—you go try to find a home, and the landlord don't give you a home because of your gender. You come to us say, [smack] “Hey, I've seen four or five other people get this house that I wanted, but this guy won't give me this home because I'm a female, a female won't get a home.” So what we do you write out a complaint, once you get a complaint then, you know, then we—then we—then we have an investigator, that go to investigate the situation try to have—a have a medium—try to have like a mediator so we can resolve it, and we can't resolve it then we take it to court. We have subpoena power, where we can subpoena you, [Strong laughs] we can court subpoena you, uh, to get this case resolved.

[1:03:00]

As far as job—job discrimination, so I'm African American, and they get on it, you have to have certain percentage of people that have to have jobs, you have to have some type of minority they look at like as females as a minority. Just for instance, African Americans that go try to find a job if they can't job at that time, you know, they come to us say, Hey this guy won't give me a job, or, This lady, the boss, won't give a job because he said because I'm black. Fill out a complaint, same thing. Um, so if you on a job, employment, if you working at a job and you get discriminated on that, we have—we have direct empowerment with the EOC, EOC is a place in Indianapolis, it's like a federal place where it kinda like they do more research, more intensive research, they come out so if they find findings on you. So we have a lot of power, so you can tell. So it's so many things in that, and that's just a shallow part of things that they do at the Human Rights Commission.

Munro: Same question for the Weed and Seed Program.



[1:04:00]

Strong: The Weed and Seed Program was something that we—the Weed and Seed—the Weed side was more of the raids, the prostitution stings, and more of the law enforcement. Just a shallow part about it, we all had the mayor at the time, the mayor was, I think, Mayor McShirly, we had the chief of police, had different—Red Cross to Ball Brothers Foundation into—different entities came together to—because there's a federal grant that you can Weed and Seed out your community and bring the community back, the way it needs to be as a safe community. So the Seed side of—part is criticism, and that's why I like criminal justice. And, to interject, being at Ball State, the reason I never had to study, and I always got good grades in criminal justice, because I used to be a criminal. I always just knew, I mean, I knew a class A felony to a class B felony to a class C, D felony, all my friends went through the prison system.

[1:05:00]

I didn't want to visit, I understand—I went to court with them. I knew what Indiana Codes was, and so I always resorted back to how I lived my life. So I really didn't have to worry really about studying in criminal justice, and that's why I w—that's why it was so easy for me to graduate from Ivy Tech and different places like that. But the Seed side was the one I was the one I was the co-chair with. Prevent people from going to prison, help people's families find jobs. They had a thing called a friendly felony, jobless—at the Delaware County Correction to this day, there was myself and a couple more people had presented that to the community for people that have families. So I didn't want people to go back to prison. When they got out of prison I wanted to find different resources to help them—help them stay—stabilize their lives in the community, and to resort back to the community and be a part of a productive citizen in our community.

Munro: As I'm sure you're aware, weed has become legalized in a couple states now.

[1:06:00]

I'm curious on what your opinion is on that whole deal. Even though Indiana's probably pretty far from—from that happening. What would—

Strong: Well yeah I think—I think now at this component, I have a lot of friends that I want to help, find jobs myself this Enough is Enough movement I went—I went way far behind and now a lot of people that come to me and talk to me from religious to political, to even people that's friends that I know in the streets that are out there doing it, we have different types of debates. My opinion is that—is that, I've never seen nobody overdose on Marijuana, now if they put other stuff in there that's different. I've never seen nobody get anything of that nature. But if you look at Minnesota—Minnesota, Colorado, I mean, with Colorado [unintelligible] they're making billions and billions of dollars, on Marijuana alone.

[1:07:00]

So if I would say Marijuana really need to be legalized because there's something more important now is other drugs out here now. You have the meth, crystal meth, you know, meth, Delaware county ranks number one in the state of Indiana in meth labs. Now you have Heroin has came back. When you find young boys thirteen and fourteen years old on meth—on heroin and meth, that's a real troubling time, you got—you got different people on substance abuse, where they taking pills, Xanax's. You got different type of pills they sniffin, and these young kids, Marijuana is not a—kids smoke Marijuana he just be high, cause you only get a whole—a higher level THC, and that you can't get no higher when you're on Marijuana [Strong laughs].

[1:08:00]

You can smoke a whole—a whole pound you going to get no higher. But I never seen nobody die off of Marijuana so I really believe Marijuana need to be legalized in Indiana as well. And then we have a thing we've got to do when—if I want to get a job. Some people can't get jobs because they smoke Marijuana, so here we go another thing with the state, and I think if they do get legalized, more people can have jobs. Don't come—don't come to work high. But it's more just need to be—I believe for my opinion it needs to be legalized in the state of Indiana. For known purposes, because it's not right [unintelligible] my son out I said, you smoking marijuana, there's nothing—at the same time.

[1:09:00]

You know, we got heroin and meth, they worse than—and people die, you know? And they put Fentanyl in heroin now. Just these—Lord these last—last couple months, there are people that die even more, and more. And NARCAN, they got—put you on the sniffer, shoot you with NARCAN and bring you back to life. My dad, he was a heroin addict, he's a recovering heroin addict. He'd done it right in front of my face, he didn't know any better. I was young, he may not think I wanted—but my dad he's old now he's grey now, I mean, he's got health problems. But I think heroin and meth and those other drugs are more important to deal with other than marijuana. So, if I had a say, Marijuana need to be legalized in the state of Indiana. And myself being in politics, I will fight it and I will say the same thing, you know, because Indiana is more so late.

[1:10:00]

We're at least, like, ten to fifteen years behind other states—that's—we talk about as far as culture, we talk about as far as job opportunities, we're talking about even marijuana, same sex marriages. I lived in Boston when they passed the same sex marriage law, I was right there, I won't forget UMass Boston facility. You know, so I think Indiana's kinda like, like about ten or fifteen years behind other states. It's just my opinion.

Munro: Speaking of you being a politician, in February of—or in an article published in

February of 2011, it mentions that you were running for City Council.

Strong: At large.

Munro: Yes.

Strong: Yeah.

Munro: And the article quoted you as saying, "I want to go in the race as a servant not as a politician."

Strong: Yes.

[1:11:00]

Munro: Could you elaborate on that?

Strong: Well what it is—it's a different—when the word "politician" in the United States of America you can tell from Donald Trump, you can tell from Mike Pence, you can tell from different, politician is, it leaves a bad taste in somebody's mouth when you mention the word politician. Politics, from my understanding, it means we politicking, means that when you go out you handing out brochures when you're knocking door to door. When you [Strong clears throat] when you ask, [unintelligible] polls, when you put a pole up, and when—that's politicking. That's like, you know, what you really mean, shaking hands. But a servant is to—let me give you some example, this is what—this is—I remember the article, I think I gave them an example. That when you go to your finest restaurant, you go to the finest restaurant, the first thing you do your waitress come in and say, "Hey," they help you "what is the first thing would you like to drink?"

[1:12:00]

You say, "Water." "Well I'm going to give you a couple minutes to find out what you want to drink." You may need them to come back, so they're serving you—they're serving you—they're like "Hey, what you need?" and the reason why they're serving you is because they want the tip—they want a tip. So they're your servant, they want to make sure that you have everything that you need as far as the right food, they come back and check on and get your food, and they actually help you with your food "Anything else? You need something to drink?" So they're serving you. And that's what I want to be to—that's what I want to be to the community of Muncie, I want to serve them I want—I don't want to be named as a politician I want to be a servant—I want to be the person that no matter what race or creed or gender you are, no matter where you come from back where you come from I want to still serve you myself as—in office.

Munro: You said, in the same article, that your main focus of your campaign was to bridge the gap between Muncie and Ball State.

Strong: Yes, yes.

Munro: How did you plan to do that?

[1:13:00]

Strong: Well what happens is that you look at prior situations what I said, from people from the inner-city, they look at Muncie. They look at Ball State a whole different city, they say, Well the other people it's time that I c—I—when I come to Ball State—Ball State is like most beautiful thing. And then you have people from Ball State that they told you, say to people, "Hey don't go past that street, don't go past that street because you don't want to deal with—with those people over there" and then you have people in different offices—people in different avenues saying they don't want to collaborate with Ball State, Ball State want to collaborate with these people, these people don't want to collaborate with Ball State. So myself being in an office, I want to bridge that gap, so how can we bring Muncie as Muncie, and not people coming from out of town or any other places feel that Muncie—Muncie is different, Indiana is different from Ball State, so I want to bridge that gap between them from different [unintelligible] as far as policing.

[1:14:00]

As far as job opportunities, normally here at Ball State University they have a thing called an "in-house employment." Why can't we—why can't we bridge the gap between bringing somebody out here, give them an opportunity to come in to Muncie, into Muncie from the inner-city or from other different [unintelligible] no matter what creed or avenue you come from because they even said I—even when I was running for campaign, Well Marwin, why can't we get a job out at Ball State? From an African American standpoint—from a Caucasian standpoint. We try and try and try and I've put in over fifteen to twenty-five applications. Even myself, I don't want to work out of Ball State, I'm an upstanding man, even my son asked the question. So my heart was to try to collaborate a type—some type of coalition that we could bring together, as a whole, the Concerned Clergy, also other entities to come together as a whole and say, How can we make Muncie become as one?

[1:15:00]

And not as, this is Muncie, and this is Ball State.

Munro: An article from, April of 2008, I believe I mentioned this one earlier, said that after receiving your Bachelor's degree you had planned on attending law school so that you could become a defense—excuse me, a criminal defense attorney.

Strong: Yes.

Munro: Is that still on the radar?

Strong: Yeah, yeah, yeah it is. Matter of fact, it's funny that you say that because before I got here I was doing research on finding a nice law school but at the same time I'm scared. But the reason why I say that is because I want to wait until my kids graduate. Now I want to—two of my kids—well, my son graduated last year and my daughter graduated this year. And I have two, one that's in—one that's going in seventh grade next year, and one that's going in sixth grade.

[1:16:00]

So it's funny that you say that because I—right before I got here I planned on—I plan—I was looking at different schools. But see the thing—the thing I struggle with, because my GPA wasn't well enough for that, because I was going through a divorce, I was going through different things. And I don't want the people at law school to look at my GPA. They may look—hey I want to explain myself why—why my—my GPA the way it is—why it was. Because I'm so smarter than what people see and other people struggle with that. When they looking, you have the transcripts, you bring up, and they look at the paper that—wow, but they never get the opportunity to explain why wasn't like that. I want to pass the bar, I'd be—I'd be a heck of a great judge, I'd be an outstanding judge, I want to be a judge one day. But even to be a judge you've got to be in law school, you've got to—you've got to do that, they—a lot of people today call me Judge Mathis.

[1:17:00]

But the reason I want to be in criminal justice is because—the reason I want to be a defense attorney for the simple fact—as a young kid, I literally seen so many people around my age from the African American culture, that got so many years when you got a Caucasian male with the same charge, and they got less years. And I want to be that defense, that if I see somebody I want to do dialog to—to persuade the jury to believe that my client—I'm already talking like a judge—that my client, um, is not the—the person that the prosecution see him as. Because there are different laws and different jurisdictions—different things that—cases—that I wanted to bring out. And even from my own experience, I'm firsthand the look of this and see this and experience this, would try to defend those that, that begin [unintelligible] the judicial system.

[1:18:00]

Munro: You mentioned earlier your Enough is Enough group, uh, I'd like to go into detail on that, when and how did you get the idea for that group?

Strong: It started back years ago when I made the Fight Against Drugs and Violence back in 2003—when I came back, 2003, 2004, 2005 somewhere around there. When I came back from UMass Boston. and then I sat at my desk when I work for the Muncie Housing Authority, before I left—before I left the Muncie Housing—before I actually left my office, to go tell these young boys that I'm the new Muncie Housing Authority guy—I'm the Public Housing Manager. I talked and I

tell them, "You've got to get off the block." I just explained that I've got to feed my family. And myself having street credibility, and also reputation that I used to be that guy, and they respect me when I was in the streets, they just left. So then I go back to my office and I sit down and I ponder, I say now what can I do to change this environment?

[1:19:00]

And here goes this voice again, said, "Marwin, start your own—own Non-for-profit organization called Fighting Against Drugs and Violence" and that's how I became Star Press Person of the Year, that's how when President Barack Obama when he—I was one of his greeters when they came here to the Worthen—when they came here to Irving—Irvig gym then, when he was running for his first campaign wanting to be president I was his—I was one of his greeters. So it started way back then. So at that time, I always wanted to do it, but what happened—a lot of my friends started dyin', one of my friends got stabbed, another one of my friends got shot to death, you know, and then just these last couple murders was my friends. Close friends of mine, and I woke up in the morning—I woke up in the morning and I looking through my—I got a lot of dialog and I looked at my life and she was sleeping sound, and I said, "baby, enough is enough," I said, "God told me to start this Enough is Enough movement and I've got to do it."

[1:20:00]

But it happened years ago and not it's, like come to fruition, so, I wanted to do this, like, years ago and I'm not knowing so what I did I touched base with a guy named Rev. Harrison, out of Indianapolis for the ten-point coalition, and the guy named—he was an ex-chief [unintelligible] of Indianapolis, Indiana. him and I was on the Weed and Seed together, he was in Indianapolis ch—or Baltimore chamber, we met each other in Florida, different place that we went, and [unintelligible] said, "Hey, man, I need to—I want to do this Enough is Enough movement, they been doing a ten point coalition for many years. You probably seen it on the news a lot. "Reverent Harrison, why don't you come down man show me how you do it?" So I was calling them down just to get pointers on how to do it what should I do engaging the community, how should I go about it? And next I know, it just blew up, like, we go, like eleven hundred people with this movement, with over forty people that be walking, that be walking the streets with us this week.

[1:21:00]

And that's how it happened, it's just like it was crazy. And the Enough is Enough movement is basically just to engage in the community, to really try to have better alternatives for those that don't have alternatives. What that means—people with felonies, cause what I—what I—what I've heard about is that when you have guys with felonies, and young ladies with felonies, they can't get a job so they resort

back to where they came, they've got to make a living, they've got to feed their family. So when I go to them and I tell them, "Hey, man, we need to stop, you need to stop—you need to stop drinking, need to stop smoking, you've got to family, you need to stop selling drugs, put the guns down." They say, Marwin, what you going to give me? So I want to have something to give them, I want to have better alternatives to give them something for them to not—for them to not sell drugs. Now I can't help everybody, I understand that—that in an engagement—in an engagement in the community you can't everybody. So that's when the law enforcement come in, you know, that's when other people come in.

**[1:22:00]**

So, the Mayor of Muncie partnership up with Enough is Enough, the chief of police partnership with Enough is Enough movement that the Sheriff department partnership with Enough is Enough, Concerned Clergy, they partnership up with us. You know, so now we got the entities—this coalition—that I can go to them say "Hey this person needs a job." Right now I'm talking to different employers, "Hey," you know, "would you hire felonies? Do you guys understand that you get a certain amount of tax break—tax exemption if you hire a felon?" Now what I'm going to do I'm a mentor but I'm going to make sure they—they don't—they don't get—have a bad drug test, going to make sure they go out and they be—they be great employers. So that is what Enough is Enough pretty much is all about, engaging the community, and bring—making a difference

Munro: The—an article, also by Ball State Daily, published just last week said that you just want to make Muncie—the Muncie community feel safe again, do you personally remember a time when Muncie was safe?

**[1:23:00]**

Strong: Well, it was, in different gaps, but as a whole, it wasn't. While I lived in Muncie, my grandma [unintelligible] there's a lot of people that died, lot of people that got killed. But what happens is that, before you shoot these people, they always make sure the kids is out the way. They would warn us, say, Hey, man, you've got to get off the block cause there's about to be some stuff going on, there's about to be some shootings. And next I know, we gone. Now it's not like that, you got young twelve and eleven year old boys, man, with assault rifles, AK-47s, TEC-9s, shotguns, where do you think they get that stuff from? Because babies is raising babies. You got thirty, forty year old grandmas and grandfathers. You got kids that don't have a father or mentors in their lives.

**[1:24:00]**

You got meth, guys doing meth, twelve years old. Now what's it going to take—it take—they say it take a village to raise a child, but now it takes a village to raise a village. What that means is we've got to look out our fellow man, no matter what color you are, no matter what gender you are. We've got to start knocking door to

door, make Muncie safe again, that's from neighborhoods, that's from the city, at the store, to start talking, and getting the community engaged, start leveling with one another again. And that's the only way it's going to happen, and that's why myself fights my—myself been the visionary of this whole thing. That's why I'm reaching out to different entities. That's why I want to go out and—and have—and my Enough is Enough movement, it's just not a black thing, it's a community thing. Because in my group alone is a diverse group, you got Caucasians, African Americans, males, females. Now, in fact, you got more females than males.

[1:25:00]

Now the reason why it's like that is because females are nurtures. A male will listen to a female more than a male will listen to a male because they've got to have a macho mentality. But women are nurtures they can talk they can, you guys got a way about yourself that you can just talk to the young men and young ladies like, Hey, you know why don't you quit, don't do that. [Unintelligible] come on board and I like that as well. But the great thing about this Enough is Enough movement is a diverse group of people that's tired of what's going on in the community, they're tired of what's going on in their neighborhood and they want to make a change.

Munro: Alright, uh, taking a bit of a step away from this, you've clearly kept yourself very busy. So when in all this time did you marry your current wife?

Strong: October fifteenth, October fifteenth, we've been married for about five—five months.

Munro: Oh, wow.

[1:26:00]

Strong: Yeah, five months, it's crazy and I met her, my beautiful wife, yeah, I met her I was—I was divorced for six years, so I had a really rebuild my trust level back up. I had to rebuild my whole mindset back up cause after my first wife I said "look, I never in my life getting married again." And I loved her, we was together for eleven years, but in that time, you know, life happens, I feel bad about myself I'm like man, I'm only—you're only supposed to be married one time. I thought that was it, and people going to make fun of me if I get married twice. So all this stuff is going through my mind because growing up I was a player, I had a lot of women I—many I could choose from, what I wanted to do. The bachelor life was beautiful to me, but I was over life. My daddy was a pimp, my daddy had nine, ten kids, all together, I have approximately sixteen sisters and brothers, on both sides of my family.

[1:27:00]

So I wanted to be a family man again, I wanted to—I wanted to be myself like, man, you know what? I've been touring, I want to—I want to—I'm going to try



this again, and please bring somebody in my life. And I met her, come to find out she lived in Illinois, she left when she was about seven years old, she was—she lived in Muncie, she got family here in Muncie and when I met her, uh, start talking, her family from Muncie. And I'm like, Wow. Find out she's the same faith she's in church. She's a beautiful lady, herself she'd been through a divorce, too, so okay there you go again. So I'm like, Hey, when me met I'm like, Whoa. Two beautiful kids, Janelle and Gavin, real smart kids. And we was together—we were together two years before we got married. But it was funny how it happened because we got married, we got—we got engaged at Banker's Life Fieldhouse.

[1:28:00]

And I planned it, I mean I—I planned it, man, I called the place said, "Hey man, I've got to have this thing at Banker's Life Fieldhouse." We got—I mean, I'm telling—I've got to do it right, cause I told her—I told her—I'm like, "Hey," you know, like, "you know that—you know that when I get married again, this time it's "death 'til us part" I'm not getting divorced. So if you think we're going to get divorced you mind as—you mind a well—you mind as well not marry me." And she's like, "nah, I'm not getting divorced neither." so I'm like well okay, I just want to let you know. Pinkie finger promise this is it, I'm done. I'm not divorcing come out both our mouths and I meant that. So time progressed, she was—she lived in Illinois, and I was—I drove back from Illinois, every other weekend, then she moved to Indianapolis. And then we got to Banker's Life Fieldhouse, I called my pastor, called other people in her family, told her that we're going to Banker's Life Fieldhouse. Took a tour of the building, and then on the side of the thing we—I asked her if she'd marry me.

[1:29:00]

So then on halftime, they had us on the big old TV, national TV, and, they had them coming, and we talking and they had Angie and Marwin on there. It was beautiful—it was beautiful, so we were supposed to get married this June, but she's like, "Nah, Marwin, I don't think we can—we need to wait," and we got married and it was the most beautiful wedding I ever had in my life. I never thought I'd love again. I really—so it was heaven sent, she was heaven sent.

Munro: Congratulations.

Strong: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Munro: So at this point, I'd like to, I guess just, talk about growing up as an African American in general.

Strong: Yes.

Munro: Did—in some of this I guess we'll go back to your childhood, but growing up did you remember learning about black history in school at all, or—

[1:30:00]

Strong: Yeah, I learned about it at home, my mother and them taught us about—in community school they never taught us about Martin Luther King, and Malcom X, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks. We didn't—if we wanted to learn anything we had to research on our own. We didn't have the big quote unquote "Black History Month." They didn't really teach us anything about—we didn't know our culture. They talk about Abraham Lincoln, they talk about loads of other things they didn't teach us anything but just the popular people. They talk about Black Panthers, so, but they talk about slaves, they gave us a slave mindset.

[1:31:00]

But growing up, we was always taught that the white man was superior to the black man. We was always taught that the white person always get more, more than the black man so we was the have-nots. We was the people that—so growing up in the projects, quote unquote "ghetto" we didn't—we was the hopelessness and you gon—you gon—you going to be young, be dead—be dead baby daddy, yous going to die at an early age by being killed, but you will never have a good job, yous going to go to prison, and it's going to be hard for you out there, many times I'd seen skin head police that came out here and beat my friends. They called them niggers, We better not see you out ever again in life. One particular time they had a place called Rosnic Park.

[1:32:00]

And what happened my brother—my brother and—my brother—was the oldest, Stevie, I believe was in tenth grade at the time. I was, I believe in seventh—I think seventh grade, and we was out playing basketball. So some Caucasian guys came to us and we were playing and we was pretty good, and they said, Hey, man, wan—want to be IU Hoosier against Georgetown players? We knew what that meant, IU was a predominantly white basketball team and Georgetown was a predominantly black team. Coach Thompson, Patrick Ewing, all them guys. We're like, Okay, just—let's go. So we blew them out. So they turned red in the face like, Let's play again. So we hear, you know "you little niggers" you know, and we like, well, and everybody knows, man, we blew them out again. Oh come on, niggers. Now they ask us—come on honky, let's do this, you all want to go again? We blew them out again.

[1:33:00]

At the time they hit my boy—my friend in the head with a rock, blood everywhere all down the back of his head and, you know, and they outnumbered us. You niggers never come back to this park again. Well by that time, because I could fight, I was—I was a black—I was a brown belt, I'm not scared of you. But I didn't fight because they were bigger than me, I'm like, they're real, big they had to be in about tenth grade, yeah tenth, eleventh grade. We're in seventh, can't

whoop all them. Well by the time my mother—she lived across the street, somebody went and told my brother Stevie. But again my brother's protective of me so he said "well," he said "what's going on?" and I never tell my brother nothing because I don't want brother—my brother is kinda crazy in the head, he did—when it comes to his brother, Marwin, he didn't care about that. So he went out there, boom, [clap].

[1:34:00]

Couple of them guys on the same football team as him. Knocked him cold out, there was about six or seven of them. So next thing I know, man, the police come—police come, here we got people coming outside, the mother she's irate, my friend got blood on him. The police didn't even come to us, went right to the white men. The parents, Oh those niggers been picking with our kids, they picking with our kids all the time, all they do is come to Washington Park [unintelligible] little niggers, y'all come out here to [unintelligible], we going to take you all down. So we never got the opportunity to tell our story. So that's how it was back then, it was a real struggle.

[1:35:00]

Munro: There were a lot of places that were not legally segregated, definitely by a certain point it was—wasn't legal to segregate anywhere, but there was a lot of social segregation—

Strong: Yes th—

Munro: So it sound like that park became—

Strong: Yeah—

Munro: —one of those—

Strong: Yeah—

Munro: —places.

Strong: Yes, yes.

Munro: Were there any other places in Muncie?

Strong: Yeah, Walsh Center, well, Shedtoun there, you couldn't—you couldn't go out there. That's a no-no. You couldn't go out to Shedtoun at all. Probably still now, you can't go out there, [unintelligible] people out there but, they don't say too much to you, but they give you that look. I know I went out for city council at large this last time. You know, normally I'd be the—on the poll day, what happened was you, you've got to put your polls in different areas where they have polling at. So I go out to the law center, probably about six o'clock in the morning

and two big white guys approach me.

[1:36:00]

They say, Nigger what you—what you got this poll out here? "I'm running for city council at large," I'm a democrat, I'm thinking, I'm a leader of the community here, I'm well known in this community. He said, "Well, what you got this out here if you ain't going to win anyway, then we'll make sure you don't win." I said, "Man, I got a right to come out here and put this poll it's six o'clock in the morning, the same time—nobody even out there." So he picked it up, I come back because at the time we had to go back around [unintelligible] poll. My—my poll was nowhere around. At least he was honest he told me that I wasn't going to get no votes there. But he just told me flat out that "there's no need for you to put your poll out here." Right down the street, right up on the underpass there's a gate right there that the city owns, it right now the city of Muncie owns it. I had a big banner up there for so many years, had to raise a lot of money, eight hundred dollars, a big banner.

[1:37:00]

I mean, it was beautiful "Strong" on it, my kids on it, real big banner. "Marwin for serving city council at large. Somebody stole it. Ripped it off. So yes, they may not say it out loud, but you can tell. You can feel it.

Munro: And this has been within the past ten to fifteen years?

Strong: This been in the past year.

Munro: A year?

Strong: Yeah, I ran for city council at large last election. Two years ago. Yeah so this just—this is still—it's still rampant, like I said, a lot of people may not say it, a lot of people may not—Caucasian may not say it to an African American but you can feel it.

[1:38:00]

Munro: I understand that you are a very—you want to help Muncie, this is your home and you don't want to just give up and leave but have there ever been times when you do just—at least a small part of you, just wants to leave and take your kids somewhere else?

Strong: It's a big part of me. Every day—every day I pray and I ask God, you know, "God what you want me to do?" I want to run for mayor, one day, this next time around, I'd be the first African American ever to be the Mayor of this city. But you got gaps, people don't want to see that. You got people that just really don't want to see—they don't want to change. They don't want to look past this—they don't want to look past—and I'm not all African American, I'm Indian, I'm Cherokee,

too.

[1:39:00]

Nobody is all the way African American, Caucasian, some people come from German, German, you know, somebody say you're not always just one race. But all time I do, I'm so indebted to this community, I'm the voice of Muncie, I'm the voice of my African American brothers and sisters. I go to talk to the jails about the individuals, say can you give them another chance? It's kind like shoulder pads it's like Muncie. Like football players they put shoulder pads on, it's like Muncie is my shoulder pads, and I'm carrying them around everywhere I go. Now if I leave then where's—who's going to be the next hope. Still a young man, then when I retire, my wife and I we talk about it all the time. I live out close by Yorktown, but still want to be within the city limits. So if somebody just said "Marwin we got a house for you, it's for free" you know, they got—they got it now—now I'm going.

[1:40:00]

But it's hard being a black man living in this city. It's hard. Especially being a pr—a prestigious African American man because what happens is when you get these people they want—they'll only let you only go to the same level, they going to let you go to the same level and I thought they ain't from my culture they say, Marwin, in the eyes of them you still a nigger. And that that that chills me, cause I don't want to be labeled as a race, I want to choose—I want to choose to—judge my character, judge my integrity, judge me on my actions. Don't judge me on my color. And that's—that bothers me a lot, because I can be the next mayor of Muncie.

[1:41:00]

Because I could—I could go over [unintelligible] of Republican, Democrat, Independents, I don't care if you white, black, blue, or purple. I judge people by the way they act and their heart. But yes I think about it a lot.

Munro: Um, there, uh, hopefully maybe to find something a little, uh, less, uh, depressing, um [Munro laughs]

Strong: Oh, [Strong laughs] [unintelligible]

Munro: No, that's alright.

Strong: You're fine, you're fine.

Munro: There were many black owned businesses in Muncie for a time, did you frequent any when you were younger?

Strong: Yeah I went to a lot of them, I went to a lot of them, and I think there need to be

more. But from an African American standpoint you know, we fear that we don't support each other enough. You know, we don't feel like we support each other enough that we can, I wish it was more, but we do need the support from the community.

[1:42:00]

You know, I mean, like they say, who get—who make the best barbeque, you know what they say? African American. Who make the best soul food? African American. But we just need the support. There's a lot of businesses, man, in Muncie, but we need—we need help from other people. Because at the same time, we feel like, we have a victimized—as African Americans, we feel we victimized here. I—you just—it just the way that—we don't feel like we can have, and to answer your question, no. Marwin, you should be in the high position that you are, man, you do everything—anything—you do everything for people. They have to give you something and, man, you've got to have something man you do it. And see when I do it, I don't do it for accolades—my—anything I do in life is not for accolades it's because here I am, I'm an example, that a person can come from poverty.

[1:43:00]

African American can come from poverty and pull his bootstraps up with my faith and help of other people, you know, and become this man that I am, I want to give back. And that's where the Enough is Enough movement come from, that's the path of my life when I was Muncie Housing Authority, that's where me being a building commissioner, Human Rights Commission, all these things in my mind, like, how can I give back to my community. Because just as well African American, you have Caucasians on food stamps, you have Caucasians that's—that don't have money, it's a community thing. I love my—I love this community. Here we go, a key question what will happen if I leave? What would happen if I didn't start the Enough is Enough movement? Other killings? What would happen if I was dead and wasn't around here?

[1:44:00]

Who else would have stepped up? So this is a calling, you know Martin Luther King said he made it to the mountain top, that's a vision. He—many will say—I see exactly what my purpose in life is. This is my purpose in life, it's not about me no more. When I see a kid out here without no shoes on you know how many times that I—ain't any cameras around me—how I looked at the address, what the street was—and as an anonymous person bought their kid a brand new pair of tennis shoes? And I say "Hey, what size shoe you wear?" "Mr. Strong I wear an 8." Next thing you know is they got—they got some nice Michael Jordans And they say, "where did this come from?" You know why, because a guy named Coach Lafferty done that for me. I'm the basketball—I'm the basketball coach for Southside Middle School. Eighth grade basketball, every year, every child get a

brand new pair of tennis shoes.

[1:45:00]

And you know how much—family be so happy. Like, Mr. Strong I had a light bill needing—be due, costs \$134, man, and for you showing here paying for my kid, you know how much I appreciate you for doing that? Because I was going to buy my kid some tennis shoes, I was going to buy his tennis shoes, but I had to go out there, and you helped that I can pay my light bill because you—it was you that bought him tennis shoes. That's—it's not about me. God brought me back from death's doors and brought me back to life, left me here for somebody else. Now if everybody had the heart that I have, this would be the most safest city in the whole United States of America. But I get opposition, I get opposition from people, now opposition come from people that already live that quality life, they had lived a life.

[1:46:00]

They had lived a life of people, they had mama's they had fathers they had—they had a little bit of dignity and loyalty, they had nice jobs and all this. So here you got a young man that come from nothing, now how in the world is this guy, is on the news all the time, where did this guy come from that's in the paper and—where did this guy come from? I don't know if it's jealousy, envy, I don't know if they think I'm trying to make a name for myself, in all actuality this is the heart this is what God called me to do. It's a calling, and I answered it.

Munro: Um, growing up—and I mean, even though today, what memories do you have of memories—of stereotypes against African Americans in popular culture

[1:47:00]

And how do you feel that these have changed over the years?

Strong: Well, what I see—what I see now is that, it's more—it's more under the bridge—it's more like, undercut. It's not so much open now, they have excuses why they can't get African Americans a job. They have diff—when you go to the judicial system, and they don't have a support group, like, for molestation say a Caucasian guy, and I've seen it. Uh, Caucasian have a molestation charge, I've sat in court and he had four or five numerous Caucasian charges but they gave him probation and two years house arrest. They had another guy, he had a driving while intoxicated, two of them, and he also had a marijuana charge, and he got caught for possession of cocaine in the small doses, pretty sure he—the guy was s—he was—he was probably using it, but they gave him twenty-five years.

[1:48:00]

Go figure. Think about how a mom and a daddy feel—think about how African Americans feel when that happens. This guy sit here and molested a child; this

guy was using drugs, he get caught with a DWI, why couldn't they just take his license? Make him pay a fine? So that was the deal, because I dealt with a lot of people that been—that have family that's why I'm bringing that up. I have a lot of people that call me complain say "Marwin, I went out there to get a job when to a temporary service and they hired me, man, for fifty-nine days but at the sixtieth day I can get full time employment, but just because I got employment they didn't want to—just because I have a felony they don't want to hire me full time. So, Marwin, I've got to go back out there I've got to go back out there I've got to sell drugs, like, I've got to live, I understand what you're saying, Marwin, but I don't want to hear what you've got to say no more, my family's got to eat."

[1:49:00]

So it's very—it's still here

Munro: Did you ever accept any of these stereotypes as true when you were growing up?

Strong: Yes.

Munro: When did you realize that they weren't?

Strong: When I really found out who I was. Found out who I was, I remember when I was a building commissioner, um, and we live in a county—when you live in a county, you—it's on the outskirts of Muncie. They got townships, so John [unintelligible] he's one of my mentors, he was a lawyer, he was a commissioner at the time.

[1:50:00]

I used to laugh at him all the time like, Hey man. In the inner-city where you've got stray dogs and stray cats man you find a couple of raccoons in the garbage can but, man, you out here in the county, you seen deer, you see foxes. I said—anyway I go out to this place and it was a modular home, when I lived in a modular home they put the modular home together, so they had the electrical inspected millions of times I had a USDA, I mean, these things, man, so all I've got to do is check a fitter, a fitter—a fitter's a foundational thing where you go down and—and you got—that's where you put the—the block, you put—you put the rebound there. So I had to check the fitter make sure it was below the frost line, probably about thirty-six inches below the frost line so I had to go out there. It was really hot—it was hot, man, but in 90 degrees. And me, I always try to dress professionally but in that job you don't gotta dress professionally cause you going to get dirty you've got to wear boots and—and all that good stuff.

[1:51:00]

So I go out there I'm just—I'm just out there—I go out there and next thing I know I see an eighty year old Caucasian guy come on a golf cart, him and his hound dog, as I'm looking—I'm like—I'm like, Man, like, what the world going



on out here? I'm like, Whoa, so they got the shirts off, so guy come up and he said, he rides up and say, "Hey, boy." I said, "Yeah, how you doin' sir?" You don't call a black guy "boy." I was like—I'm not worried about that so I said—he said surprised—some niggers would be out this neck of the woods. "Okay sir, I'm just here just to check a fitter, how you doin'?" you know, I go—Caucasian guys got to be about twenty-one, twenty-two years old they come in two different cars from this—from their eighty year old grandfather, and they were checked. So you know, you guys pass, you look good, I'm going to check it off, you guys go and have the cement guys come out here, and you guys go ahead, and seam it up put the foundation good luck cause you're going to have a beautiful modular home.

[1:52:00]

Always been a professional, nobody knew—nobody in that, nobody in the prejudice world, they never could break me. They call me nigger. You will never find me say, "well, you a honky" or, I never done that. Because I always got a cunning way about saying this stuff real slick, real smart and you won't know what I really—cuss you out until, like, three days later "this—this dude really just cussed me out." I was always real, real slick guy when I talk to you. So as I'm leaving they got a hound dog and old English beer—old English beer, I was like, Oh, man, that's malt liquor. It's ninety-eight degrees outside, and he's drunk, he said, "come here, boy." I said, "No sir, no sir, I've got to go, I got another space I've got to deal with." He said, "You know, I think differently about some of you niggers." I said, "Thank you, sir. I think different about you, too. Have a good day!" So I get in my car and start crying. I got real angry.

[1:53:00]

I'm looking at them, like, there he's going around like it normal to him, so I had two ways of doing this. Do I want to put this truck on four by four and run him over? But I want to just leave because I got a family to feed. So I just backed up, peeled out, and went on home. Talked to my secretary at the time, I said, "Hey, I'm about to go on home." She said "What's wrong, Marwin?" And she was even prejudice, my secretary was prejudice, she said "Where you going boy? You going home today? You lazy?" "Nah, I—I just don't feel like it today. I ain't feeling well." I go home and cried. I told my wife at the time, Shelly was my wife at the time, said "I can't, I can't deal with this stuff no more" [unintelligible] just got my first home, I never had a home, only lived in the projects.

[1:54:00]

So I said, "Man, I got mortgages to pay I can't—I can't leave this job." So I go back to work, and I had a letter that's laying on—right on my desk from John Brook [unintelligible], bless him said "Marwin, I just want to say I appreciate you—I got a phone call so I really appreciate you for being professional—how professional you were out there because I got some phone calls—anonymous phone calls from some guys said that they appreciate how good you being so

much a professional you got called racist names." But I always had it, and I always know how to deal with it. And then I understand looking what is a true nigger, nigger is a low down dirty person. Slaves, that was the way they called them—they call that generation, that they to belittle them, make us feel like less than. That's—that's not a black thing, a nigger's just a low down dirty person.

[1:55:00]

Munro: Is there anything that we didn't cover that you wished I had asked you about? Anything else you'd like to say?

Strong: You did perfect.

Munro: Thank you. Well then, on behalf of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project, thank you for taking the time to speak with me today

Strong: Thank you as well.

[1:55:29]

*End of interview*

## **Marwin Strong Information Collected from, and Questions formed during Research**

Where and when did the idea for the "Enough is Enough" movement come to be?

Ball State Daily:

Gore, Randa. "Student runs for city job: Marwin Strong looking to win position on Muncie City Council." *Ball State Daily* (Muncie, IN), Feb. 2, 2011, <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/BSUDlyNws/id/72187/rec/1> (Accessed Mar. 20, 2017).

- Shook (Former) President Barack Obama's hand
- Born and raised in Muncie
- In 1998, went to party, drink was spiked with iodine, went into coma for 2 months and was in hospital for 2 years
  - Had to relearn walking and talking
- Went to University of Massachusetts and played basketball
- Returned to Muncie, became landlord of apartments he used to live in
- Got started in Politics in Muncie
- Founded non-profit organization: Fight Against Drugs and Violence
- As of 2/2/11, Chairman of the Human Rights Committee
- 'I want to go in [the race] as a servant, not a politician' (expand on that???)
- Main focus of campaign was to "bridge the gap between Muncie and Ball State."

Shaner, Kyle. "Staying Strong: Junior Marwin Strong works to save others 10 years after he awoke from a coma." *Ball State Daily* (Muncie, IN), Apr. 17, 2008, <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/BSUDlyNws/id/74695/rec/1> (Accessed Mar. 20, 2017).

- Had been playing summer league basketball with future professionals when the party with the spiked drink occurred
- **States that "by the grace of God... He brought me back." It's not uncommon for people to suddenly become religious/have a new or renewed faith after such close calls with death. Were you religious before your incident? How did this event shape your faith in God?**
- Mother was a single parent and raised him and his seven siblings.
- Went straight from high school to Ball State???
- Became the university's all-time leading scorer
- Received a scholarship offer from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas
  - But would only cover half of tuition and family couldn't afford the other half
- ...Instead of going on to play college basketball after high school, Strong stayed in muncie and began dealing drugs summer after graduation
  - Played basketball during this time

- Spiked drink took about a month to put him in a coma, cough, then sores, then weight loss, then heart failure, then brain began leaking fluid.
- Missed the registration period for his first year at University of Massachusetts, the following year he played for the Division III team
- Left Boston after 1 year of playing (2 years of school) and returned to Muncie, enrolled in Ivy Tech for a semester and then transferred to Ball State
- Knew Jo Ann Gora before she was Pres. of Ball State (and actually possibly introduced her to Ball State)
- While a student at Ball State, was working as the Delaware County building commissioner
  - Youngest person to hold the position
  - First black man to get the job
- As of 4/17/08, president of Human Rights Commission and the co-chair for Weed and Seed program
  - **\*Double check that he was, in fact, a student during all this\* How did you juggle being a student with the building commissioner position, presidency of the Human Rights Commission, and the co-chair for Weed and Seed program?**
- **As I'm sure you are aware, weed has been legalized in a couple states now. Though Indiana is far from that possibility, I'm curious as to what your opinion is on the legalization of weed?**
- Expected to get associates from Ivy Tech in summer of 08, and bachelors from Ball State in spring of 09
- "After he gets his bachelor's degree, Strong said, he plans on attending law school so that he can become a criminal defense attorney and help at-risk youth and people without any hope."
  - Has this happened??? If not, ask about if this is still in his plans for the future.
- "My main dream: I want to speak to a million kids at one time, and I always wanted to speak to all the Ball State kids in Emens Auditorium"
  - Same for this one
- "Despite the fact that he did not reach his dream, Strong said, he has found his passion in life in helping others and he happy with where he is at. "Sometimes I look back over my life and I be like 'wow, I went through that, dodging bullets,' and to be where I'm at now, it's a blessing all in itself," he said.
  - **If you could go back to that party and change what happened, would you do it if it meant you could have your original dream of being an NBA player?**

Fittes, Emma Kate. "Muncie Activists to hold vigil in honor of Martin: Former student coordinates event to create outlet." *Ball State Daily* (Muncie, IN), July 18, 2013, <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/BSUDlyNws/id/70553/rec/1> (Accessed Mar. 20, 2017).

- As of this article: chairman of Muncie Human Rights Commission

Wehlann, Kate. "Families, friends walk for lost loved ones: Almost 100 people show up despite rain, low temperature." *Ball State Daily* (Muncie, IN), Oct. 4, 2010, <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/BSUDlyNws/id/73601/rec/1> (Accessed Mar. 20, 2017).

- As of this article: Delaware County building commissioner and youth minister

Freda, Mary. "Community activist calls meeting to address gun violence in Muncie." *Ball State Daily* (Muncie, IN), Feb. 9, 2017, <http://www.ballstatedaily.com/article/2017/02/news-gun-violence-muncie> (Accessed Mar. 20, 2017).

- Called press conference
- This is when "Enough is Enough" was formed to help end drug and gun violence in Muncie
- Has had to eulogize about 30 friends over the past 3 years
- Published his direct line for citizens (who are afraid to speak to police) to be able to contact him about recent homicide

Berg, Kara. "Local group 'Enough is Enough' aims to stop Muncie gun violence." *Ball State Daily* (Muncie, IN), Mar. 18, 2017, <http://www.ballstatedaily.com/article/2017/03/news-enough-is-enough> (Accessed Mar. 20, 2017).

- Just wants to make Muncie safe again
  - **An article (by Kara Berg), stated that you "just [want] to make the Muncie community feel safe again." Do you personally remember a time when Muncie felt safe? In your opinion, when did that start to change?**
- Strong plans to get out in the community and walk the streets in high-crime areas, and ideally turn those doing illegal things in the right direction.

Fox 59:

Houser, Shannon. "Muncie looks to mimic Indianapolis' Ten Point Coalition." *Fox 59*, last modified Feb. 21, 2017, <http://fox59.com/2017/02/20/muncie-looks-to-mimic-indianapolis-ten-point-coalition/> (Accessed Mar. 20, 2017).

- Still working on Enough is Enough movement
- Research the Ten Point Coalition from Indy

CBS4:

"Muncie officials join 'Enough is Enough' group to announce plan to deter crime." CBS4, last modified Mar. 15, 2017, <http://cbs4indy.com/2017/03/15/live-stream-muncie-officials-join-enough-is-enough-group-to-announce-plan-to-deter-crime/> (Accessed Mar. 20, 2017).

- "Leader" of "Enough is Enough"
- All three goals—improved community-police relations, summer jobs and crisis intervention programs

### **Questions pulled from General Question List:**

Let's start with your childhood, when and where were you born?

Where did you go to school?

Were there any teachers in your grade school(s) that have stuck with you over the years?

(For those who were born/raised in Muncie), Ball State prides itself in its mission to link to the local community, do you remember any specific ways that Ball State and your local community connected?

Did you ever feel pressured by friends or family to go to college?

Some of the most common reasons for students choosing Ball State over other colleges and universities over the years has been how close it is to home, and the relatively low costs and modest admission standards. What were your reasons for choosing Ball State? Were there any other colleges or universities you considered?

What do you remember of the University President during your attendance? Would you consider him or her to have been active in student affairs? (Jo Ann Gorra was president, he said that he met her before hand)

Places like Tuhey Pool here in Muncie were not "legally" segregated, but socially segregated for a time, were there any places either here or elsewhere where you experienced this?

(For older interviewees who would have been around during the time of black businesses)  
There were many black-owned businesses in Muncie for a time, did you frequent any when you were younger? What places? Why there in particular?

Do you have any memories of stereotypes against African Americans in popular culture or marketing? If so, what are these stereotypes?

What kind of television shows do you remember watching? Did you feel you were well represented on these programs?

Was there a particular African American role model you identified with growing up?

Growing up hearing about black stereotypes, did you ever accept them as true? When did you realize they weren't?

Do you feel that the image of the African American has changed in the past few decades? Why or why not?

Did you feel as if athletics were the only way to obtain a higher education?

What does holding a higher education mean to you?

Growing up, what did you think of the activism and civil rights movement?

How did your parents explain these types of movements to you?

How did your parents explain events such as the murder of Emmett Till? Did it feel like murders/lynchings were distant events or did it feel like it could happen in the area?

Do you remember learning anything about slavery/the slave trade growing up? How much of it was in school vs. at home?



When

What year did you begin attending University of Massachusetts?

You have University of Massachusetts and Ivy Tech in Muncie listed for your Associates Degree in criminal justice for May of 2009. Then Ball State is listed as a general studies with a minor in sociology and criminology. Was Ball State where you received your Bachelor's? What year did you receive it?

Graduated High School in 1995

Attended a summer basketball thing

Party in 1998, goes into coma 1 month later also 1998, and wakes up in 1998

Stays in hospital for 2 years (gets out 2001?)

Attends University of Massachusetts for 2 years, only plays basketball for the 2nd year **2002**

Returns home to Muncie, transfers to Ivy Tech, then a semester later to Ball State 2011

By Spring of 2008, Delaware County building commissioner, president of HRC, and co-chair of W&S **All while still a student??? Yes!**

In Fall of 2010, still the Delaware County building commissioner, and also a youth minister

Winter/Spring 2011, chairman of HRC

Summer 2013, chairman of HRC

Winter/Spring 2017, started "Enough is Enough"

Hello my name is Charity Munro, today's date is March 25th, 2017 and I am interviewing Marwin Strong on the Ball State campus, as part of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project.

When and where were you born?

Where did you go to school?

If asking about childhood he will likely mention his brothers and sisters, don't forget to ask for their names!

Were there any teachers in your grade school(s) that have stuck with you over the years?

Do you remember learning anything about slavery/the slave trade growing up? How much of it was in school vs. at home?

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Did you ever feel pressured by friends or family to go to college?

In 1998, you went to a party that had a huge impact on your life. Do you mind explaining what happened? Did you ever find out who had spiked the drink? Did you report them?

A Ball State Daily article from April of 2008 quotes you as saying that "by the grace of God... He brought me back." It's not uncommon for people to have a new or renewed faith after such close calls with death. Were you religious before your incident? How did this event shape your faith in God?

After getting out of the hospital, you attended University of Massachusetts, what was the appeal of going to college?

What does holding a higher education mean to you?

Why did you leave the University of Massachusetts after only 2 years?

Transferred to Ivy Tech and then to Ball State

Were there any professors that really stuck with you?

When did you get started into politics? When did you become interested in politics?

A Ball State Daily article from February of 2011 mentions that you shook hands with Former President Barack Obama? What was the reason for you meeting with him?

While you were a student at Ball State, you were working as the Delaware County Building Commissioner, and not only were you the youngest person to hold that position, but also the first black man to get the job! How did that feel? What did the job entail? Did you ever feel any workplace discrimination?

At one point you were also the president of the Human Rights Commission, and a co-chair for Weed and Seed program. How did you juggle these three positions while also being a student?

What is the Human Rights Commission? What does it do for Muncie?

I'd like to ask the same thing about the Weed and Seed program, what is it and what does it do for Muncie?

As I'm sure you are aware, weed has been legalized in a couple states now. Though Indiana is far from that possibility, I'm curious as to what your opinion is on the legalization of weed?

In February of 2011, when you were running for city council, the Ball State Daily article quoted you as saying "I want to go in [the race] as a servant, not a politician." What did you mean by that?

The same article said that your main focus of your campaign was to "bridge the gap between Muncie and Ball State." How did you plan to do that? Did you continue that mission despite losing the campaign? How have you done this?

A Ball State Daily article from April of 2008 said that after receiving your bachelor's degree you planned on attending law school so you could become a criminal defense attorney and help at-risk youth. Is this still something you plan to do?

You've recently created a group called "Enough is Enough." When and how did you get the idea for this group? What do you hope it will do that other groups, such as the Human Rights Commission or the Weed and Seed program, have not been able to accomplish?

An article by the Ball State Daily published just last week stated that you "just [want] to make the Muncie community feel safe again." Do you personally remember a time when Muncie felt safe? In your opinion, when did that start to change?

You've clearly kept yourself busy over the years! When during this time did you get married?

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Even, CA

Relationship w/

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After getting out of the hospital, you attended University of Massachusetts, what was the appeal of going to college?

Uncle's name

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An article by the Ball State Daily published just last week stated that you "**just [want] to make the Muncie community feel safe again.**" **Do you personally remember a time when Muncie felt safe? In your opinion, when did that start to change?**

You've clearly kept yourself busy over the years! When during this time did you get married?

Deacon  
Current wife Angie

Oct 5th

Spiritual, not religious  
23-25

Muncie Diagnostic  
Public

2007.

Dear Mr. Strong,

Thank you for making your voice heard for the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017. I know that some of the stories you shared may not have been easy to tell, but the information you provided in your interview was incredibly helpful.

Your service within the Muncie community will be inspiring to those who view the recording in the future.

A review copy of the transcript for your interview will be completed and sent to you in the coming weeks. When looking it over, please make sure any proper names are spelled correctly and that the transcriber has accurately typed what you said. After you have returned your corrected transcript, we will make the necessary changes and send you a final copy to thank you for participating in this project.

Thank you again for your time and your information!

Charity Munro (your interviewer)

# Archives and Special Collections

University Libraries



Ball State University  
Bracken Library, Room 210  
Muncie, IN 47304

Phone: 765—285—5078  
FAX: 765—285—8149  
Email: [libarchives@bsu.edu](mailto:libarchives@bsu.edu)

## Ball State University African—American Alumni Oral History Project

Archival Identification:

Interviewer: Charity Munro

Interviewee: Roland Wiley

Videographer: Mitch Kissick

Supervisor: Frank Lacopo

Date of interview: April 1, 2017

Munro: Hello my name is Charity Munro today's date is April 1, 2017, and I am interviewing Mr. Roland Wiley on the Ball State Campus as a part of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project. I'd like to start with your childhood, when and where were you born?

Wiley: Well, hello April, no it's not—it's April one.

Munro: [Munro laughs] Yes. [Wiley laughs] April first.

Wiley: It was an April Fool's Joke. [Wiley laughs] Hi, Charity, my name is Roland Wiley, I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana on July 24, 1956. My mom and dad are still alive, my dad is ninety-one years old, he just celebrated his birthday a few days ago and my mom is eighty-five years old, they've been married for about 63 years.

Munro: What are the names of your parents?

Wiley: My dad's name is Roland Alexander Wiley, he was the first; my mom's name is Evelyn Beatrice Wiley.

[1:00]

Munro: Do you have any siblings?

Wiley: I have a sister, one sister, Debra Ladelle Wiley, she also went to Ball State. She is sixty—she'll be sixty-two this year.

Munro: Where did you go to school at?

Wiley: Besides—before Ball State? [Wiley laughs]

Munro: Oh, before Ball State—

Wiley: Okay—

Munro: Yes.

Wiley: I am a proud product of the public school system. I went to public school number Thirty-seven, Hazel Hart Hendricks Public School for elementary school, and I went to Arsenal Technical High School for high school, both of them are in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Munro: Were there any teachers, in either of those schools, that really had an impact on you?

Wiley: Absolutely, absolutely. At school Thirty-seven was Mr. Davis, and he was shop teacher.

[2:00]

And I wonder, looking back, why did he have such an impact on me, and all of the young men, the young boys? And it was—Mr. Davis was one of the few black men in the school. Now looking back I didn't know why it was we were all drawn to him, and he was a real sharp dresser, you know, he had a bald head, and just really, he wore suits all the time, really—just from a kid's perspective they were really nice suits, and he just carried himself so well. And he was our shop teacher, so he taught us how to use power tools, how—taught us about woodworking and the grain of the wood and how things go together. So it was like, almost a philosophy class where he'd sit us down in the beginning of the class we'd all sit in two or three rows and he'd talk to us about just life situations. I don't know what but I—you'd just listen to him and—this old man that just talked so confidently. And then he'd teach us how to use tools.

[3:00]

And simple things like screwdrivers and saws but also power equipment, drills and jigsaws, so that was—Mr. Davis was the most impactful teacher in my grade school days at school Thirty-seven. And there were a significant amount of women teachers who—teachers who also they just sewed a lot of positive seeds in my life. Miss Wooden was my first grade teacher, Miss Montgomery was my second grade teacher, Miss Walker was my fifth grade teacher, Miss Height was my sixth grade teacher, and they all had something special about them. Miss Hayden was my seventh grade teacher who, coincidentally, her sons were a set of twins are fraternity brothers, my fraternity brothers here at Ball State, I didn't even know that until I was practically out of, out of school that your mom is Miss Hayden? My goodness!

[4:00]

So, had a lot of teachers that had a really positive influence in my life, encouraging me. Saying that I could really make something of myself, and I



appreciated that.

Munro: Growing up, where did you learn the most about black history?

Wiley: Hmmm. Now that's a very interesting question. Where did I learn the most about black history? I would say my own research, and it started in 1968 with the death of Martin Luther King. At my age, I was an observant person but not a real talkative person, so I observed a lot.

[5:00]

And black history, I don't even—I guess we had black history month, back then, and we talked about George Washington Carver and Frederick Douglas and Harriet Tubman, and all of the very important people in black history, however the connection wasn't there, they were just names and places. And I didn't really start to really connect to black history until Martin Luther King was assassinated. And I was twelve years old at the time. And then I started to research who Martin Luther King was, because you know who they are based on what you hear on television, but you really have to read to really find out who they were and what they were about.

[6:00]

And I remember when he—when he died I did just a voluntary report on his life and I went to, there was a pharmacy down the street from the street from my—our house and went there bought all the magazines and books that they had about Martin Luther King, and I just really researched his life about non-violence and about what people went through in the South, about segregation, which I wasn't really aware of. And that started this journey, I believe, at twelve years old, on understanding black history. And it's really, Charity, it's such a broad history and I do a black history presentation. I started a mentorship program about eight years ago. And I start black history with the question, these kids they're about, my age—twelve years old, eight, ten, twelve years old and I ask them "alright, somebody tell me something about black history or a name in black history." Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth.

[7:00]

They go on and on with these names, but the thing is, what we know about black history only starts after slavery. And black history goes back to the beginning, with Adam and Eve. And so, that journey, and learning about true black history, and truly where we come from before slavery has been a lifetime journey. I think it's such an important journey, to learn and to share. And I think that's going to be key to the future, the future of our world, the future of African Americans, so school—black history in school I don't think is nearly what it should be. And I don't know why, I mean I have my own theory, but black history is, as I see, black history is so much more, so much deeper, and I still haven't connected all the dots, it's a journey that I started when I was twelve years old and I'm still on it.

[8:00]

Munro: So you said you were twelve years old when Martin Luther King was killed?

Wiley: Yes, 1968.

Munro: So how aware of the civil rights movement were you before that moment?

Wiley: And that's the point, I wasn't. And I find that, I'm curious about that, so much was going on and I was fairly conscious, I guess, but I g—on the other hand I guess I wasn't, because you heard about Malcom X and he got killed in '65, and you kinda, oh well he was a militant, you know, he was a black Muslim, that's what the—our community—the rumblings in our community but we didn't really know how complex his story was, we only were benefited from what the media was saying, and the media painted him as a radical, as a—somebody that was dangerous, as a—hate speech.

[9:00]

And that kept our community at large and kind of this place of "well, you want to stay away from—from that person" and when he was killed I remember being aware of it but I was "oh that's that dangerous guy that got killed" you know, and didn't really—didn't really put any of the pieces to the puzzle together, I was unhappy that it happened, but that didn't really [smack noise] light a spark. It was when Martin Luther King got killed three years later, I said, well, wait a minute? Well what's going on here?" And come to find out he was in Memphis for garbage men strike, and he was just simply killed, and then you start to be aware of the civil rights workers, the three workers that were killed and buried, and then all of—all of what Rosa Parks—all of what she—that's amazing! You know, now that I'm thinking about it—I didn't know about Rosa Parks until Martin Luther King was killed.

[10:00]

All of that was going on—and I guess at twelve years old—anybody at twelve years old is relatively innocent they, you know, they're living in their own world and I guess I was just in my own world, not—and my community wasn't really in—advocates, or really up in arms about that kind of—we did not have in Indianapolis the just blatant segregation, in your face kind of segregation, so, it wasn't that—you're just not that aware of how things were, really were back in the '60s.

Munro: So it sounds like, then, even—you said your community, so including your parents, possibly didn't have much of an opinion on the civil rights movement?

Wiley: You know, one of the things that I'm very grateful to my father for is he didn't tell us about how bad it was.

[11:00]

My father was born Pine Bluff, Arkansas, raised in the south. And actually, he had to leave, flee, Pine Bluff because he was rude to a white man, and his mother said "look, you've got to get up and get out of here." Literally within the next day, he was—he was out. And he never talked about that time in the south and the blatant racial discrimination, the lynchings, he never talked about that. And I'm grateful, I'm grateful to him, because I didn't grow up with a chip on my shoulder, I didn't grow up being mad at white people or thinking, Oh, they're a bad person. I came to Ball State with a fairly level head, not having a chip on my shoulder not pre-judging anybody or any race one way or another.

[12:00]

We did not talk about that period, we did not talk about racial discrimination, we did not talk about segregation. That was something that I became aware of starting that journey at twelve years old. And understanding whites only drinking fountains and all—not—just being able to sit at a lunch counter. We never experienced that in Indianapolis, Indiana. So it was—it was a—it was a learning experience for me and I—by the time I got to high school I was fairly aware of it but again that wasn't something that we talked about a lot or we spent a lot of energy going over, or creating any sort of animosity about we were busy trying to make something of our lives and having a good time.

[13:00]

Munro: Has he spoken about that time when he was younger since you have left the home?

Wiley: In bits and pieces, he talked to me about how he had to leave, Pine Bluff, years, heck I think I was about—almost forty years old when he shared that to me. He talked about his—my dad—once he left Pine Bluff he went to St. Louis, and he got into the civil service. He worked at the Army Finance Center and then he stayed in the what the government—worked at the post office in Indianapolis. He moved to Indianapolis and started with the post office. And he told me how he moved up very quickly in the post office but he got to that glass ceiling, and soon he was training young white men to be his boss.

[14:00]

He was training them to know what he knew so that they could go on and be his boss because they would not promote black men any higher than what—where he was. And that, as I now realize, takes a tremendous emotional toll on a man, when he is unable to do better for his family for artificial reasons, for reasons beyond his control. And, there—your options are limited because you can go someplace but you're going to hit that same glass ceiling and those other options are even limited. So, I wonder how that would be to me if I graduated Ball State with an architecture degree and I couldn't—I did all that work, all those all-nighters, all

that stress, and I'm ending up training people who graduated from Ball State years before I did and they go right past me and I can't go any further.

[15:00]

I wonder what that would do to me. And that's what I believe my dad went through, and as a lot of black men went through in that period and I think they dealt with a lot of ways, alcohol, depression, just closing themselves off, just not talking about it. That was something that I really appreciate my dad for staying in the family, being a father, not just talking negative, always encouraging me to do my best, and just being a man, we really didn't talk about those—just the blatant racism that he had to endure.

[16:00]

Munro: I know that you said that in your community you didn't go through a lot of the prejudice and the racism as compared to other places, but were there any black stereotypes at all that you were aware of growing up?

Wiley: Black stereotypes?

Munro: Yeah. Just that the idea that, I guess, like, certain, you know, it—those who are black are more likely to be criminals or something like that?

Wiley: I don't—I don't know, I do know that racism was—was subtle, if you will, in Indianapolis. This is—these are things I learned later. Like Riverside Park is an amusement park in Indianapolis off of 30th street and on the west side. And I used to love to go to Riverside Park, and it was, at that—growing up, you could go—we got to Riverside Park on Wednesdays. I just thought that was the day they have discounts or something. Well, I know it's [unintelligible]. I was about forty years old I come to find out that's the only day black folks could go to Riverside Park.

[17:00]

I didn't know that I just thought that's the day that I can go to Riverside Park. I wasn't aware—why's there only black people here? I don't even remember, to be honest with you. But, that was the only day black folks could go to riverside park. I lived—I was very blessed, I lived right across the street from a park, Douglas Park, I mean, literally, my house is here, there's a street and then there's Douglas Park. So, recreation was right there, I never needed to go anywhere but walk outside my front door to have a great time. There was a swimming pool, there was a tennis court, I grew up playing tennis; a golf course, my dad played golf all the time. We had our own world, and it was quality, there's no need—oh, well this is not as good as—let's—we need to go someplace else. We had quality, right across the street from us. So, I guess, I wouldn't say I lived a sheltered life but it was insolated, in a community that was fairly self—sustaining, back then, in the '60s.

[18:00]

So, the—the kinds of, um, events the kinds of experiences that can leave an emotional scare on you at a—at an early age, I was very fortunate not—to have to experience. And so as I said, I came to, by the time I came out of high school I was fairly open-minded, I was fairly, just, you know, pretty optimistic about my chances of making something of [Wiley laughs] myself in the world.

Munro: So I'd like to move on to going into college, did you ever feel any pressure from family or friends to go? Or was this something completely on your own initiative?

Wiley: Oh, yes, I wanted to be an architect since I was about six or seven years old.

[19:00]

And growing up from that point from grade school I was painfully thin and painfully quite. So I was just, as I said, and observer, and I would just watch and by the time I was six I knew I wanted to be an architect. So, my whole life was just, I want to be an architect, and all this going on around me is whatever it is, but I [Wiley laughs] going to be an architect. So, my whole focus, at that early age was architect, you know, looking at houses, playing with Legos, doing anything I could do that had anything to do with architecture. That's what I did, I just—I loved to look—to—I loved looking at buildings, I loved to look at urban environments. So I would just catch the bus, go downtown, and walk around, even at from, like, the fourth grade up, before I was old enough to drive.

[20:00]

So that was my world, and I just—I didn't have anybody motivating me to do this, this was something that I wanted to do and the limited knowledge that I had, I'm going to cobble together an opportunity to [Wiley laughs] get me to the next step to be an architect and the next after high school was to go to college. But even in high school, I had a work study, I was on a work study program. That I was in the drafting, actually the industrial engineering department at naval avionics in Indianapolis, Indiana, this was, once I turned sixteen, because I got, I remember I was old enough to drive, so I was there for a year or so and then I got another job at city hall, or the city county building in Indianapolis.

[21:00]

The year, my senior year I worked in the city county building in the urban design department doing drafting. So, I was just taking those steps and that was just my focus I don't know. My mom was very helpful, she knew I wanted to be an architect so she, like, opened up whatever doors or pointed me in whatever direction that she could with her limited knowledge about architecture, and, you know, I got good grades in high school so I was able to get a state scholarship. We didn't—my dad worked at the post office but we didn't have the kind of money to afford a university. I was very fortunate to get a state scholarship that

paid tuition and I got a student loan to pay for room and board. And that was—that was my world, I know—thing I'll never forget, I went to Arsenal Technical High School, and it's a vocational high school.

[22:00]

They have auto body, plumbing, electrician, and I was taking architectural drafting, and my councilor, Mr. Holmes, never forget that, I was at the time—he's counseling people to—after—life after high school, and at the time I was working at city hall and, you know, doing drafting, and I told him "Well, I want to go to pursue architecture, I want to go to college to—for architecture." And Mr. Holmes said "What do you want to do that for? You could have a great job at the city hall. You got benefits, you know, you got a good salary. What do you want to go to college for?" And I'm, like, seventeen at this time, and I even remember that like "you stupid" [Wiley laughs]. But it's like—but I didn't—I just looked at him, but you know it may—now that I'm older, I start to wonder what about all those young men and women that really looked at him as an authority, and really didn't have a focus or a vision about their life?

[23:00]

He put this lid on their life and that's what happens, in our communities, that so many people get caught and then fall through the cracks because they don't get the right direction, they don't get the right guidance, now those is the kind of things that I would—would call institutional racism, that, if you're in an inner-city and you're a person of color, that you are going to have a counselor who is not a person of color, who's going to direct your life and give you advice on where your life should go based on their value system, based on their assessment of who you are and how far you can go, based on their own biases. That's what I would call and define as institutional racism, that is subtle, that is not just in your face, but is just as effective.

[24:00]

Munro: Where there any other universities that you considered [Wiley laughs] other than Ball State?

Wiley: That's a—that's a great question, I laugh about it—my wife and I laugh about it to this day. I don't know how—I sent applications—I don't know—looked up in encyclopedia or something at the time, and I applied, to a few universities, University of Cincinnati, Cornell University, Ball State. And I was—I was accepted at all of them, I had very good GPA, I was in the top ten or fifteen in my high school graduation. And I got this letter of acceptance from Cornell, I'm like, Cornell? Where's Cornell? And I looked it up. Ithaca, New York? Where's Ithaca, New York? I'm not going to Cornell. It's too far away I don't have any money and I just like, my folks, they didn't know what Cornell was, and it just, never followed up on it.

[25:00]

I didn't even know, I still—I—you know, until many, many years later after I graduated from Ball State, Cornell is an Ivy League School. [Wiley laughs] I was accepted, I didn't even—I just didn't know! And that's the world that I lived in, a world of limited information, a world of limited knowledge. It has its plusses and its minuses, I didn't grow up with a chip on my shoulder because I didn't know about all of segregation but also, on the other side, you have a lack of knowledge about the world, about, all those things outside of Indianapolis, Indiana. You just don't know, you—you just—you just don't know. And so, I—my wife and I laugh about it because she's from New York and she'll say "you turned down Cornell? What's wrong with you?" [Wiley laughs] I said "I didn't know!" but that's just—and to me, I'm very happy I went to Ball State, I'm very—I could—I couldn't think of anything better than my life at Ball State.

[26:00]

Munro: So knowing what you know now, you—if you could go back and change your decision, you wouldn't?

Wiley: That's a good question, knowing what I know now I'd change a lot of things [Munro laughs] knowing what I know now, so that's not—you know, that—I'd change so many things knowing what I know now, but that's the thing, I didn't know that, and I can't change it, and I'm quite happy with the decisions that I made.

Munro: Uh, what years did you attend Ball State? Just so—just for the record.

Wiley: I graduated, no—I graduated Arsenal Technical—Tech in 1974, so I came here September 1974, architecture school at that time was a five year degree, graduated in May of 1979.

Munro: So did you said you wanted to be an architect since, six?

Wiley: Six years old.

Munro: So you knew coming into Ball State that that's what you were going to—

[27:00]

Wiley: Oh yeah—

Munro: —major in.

Wiley: I was accepted to architecture. For some reason they said, Well, you're actually going to start in the spring quarter, they were in quarter systems back then. So I was—came to Ball State, starting architecture in the spring of 1975, so the first two quarters at Ball State were just, probably the best two quarters of my life. It

was a total, just, opening up of the world to me, you know, even though the world's a lot bigger than Ball State to me. Ball State was the world coming from where I was coming from in a very lonely environment in Indianapolis where I never even had a date, I didn't go to prom, I didn't do anything all the way through high school, so I just was—the whole world opened up to me.

[28:00]

And I feel very grateful that I didn't start until the spring, because if I started architecture in the fall I would have gotten totally sucked into architecture and wouldn't have known anything or anybody but architecture because architecture is all consuming at Ball State. So I was just, so fortunate that I really consider that a blessing that I started in the fall, I was able to meet all these great people, I was able to just totally dive into a social life, to actually go to a party to learn how to dance, to learn how to talk to girls. It was just this whole world opening up for me. And I just—it was just such a wonderful time and I started architecture in the—in the spring, which I coincidentally started pledging in the spring, and I had no idea of what [Wiley laughs] I was getting into.

[29:00]

No idea. And I don't even know how I got through it to this day, I don't know how I got through it. It—that spring quarter is just a blur of getting up, st—classes were eight o'clock at in architecture, went literally eight to four, no—with one hour for lunch because eight to four was studio, and from eight to noon were classes, so it was two hour class D—DCM, Design Communication Media, and then you take a couple other courses, take calculus, or something, or English, and class is over at four. You go home, go to the dorm, get ready to eat, have dinner, and then we have what you call "study table" from six to ten so. From six to ten I'd be in the architecture building, my pledge brothers would march me over to the architecture building, get to work in the studio from six to ten, then from ten to midnight you pledge.

[30:00]

And back then pledging was—crazy, it's very physical, it's very mental, psychological, it was crazy, that you don't know what's going [Wiley laughs] you don't know if you're going to come out of it alive or anything. And you know it's just a blur and so we pledged from ten to twelve and the—my pledge brothers they'd all march home all beaten up or broken up I'd march right back up to the architecture building at twelve, midnight. Have to go back there spend another two to three hours, march back to the dorm, get up that's about three o'clock in the morning, get up at seven and start all over again. And it was just, it was a blur, it just, I don't know how I did it, [Wiley laughs] I really don't. I just—I just got up and kept doing it every day. That year I did get all C's, that was the first time I ever just got all C's on my—on my report card but, I got through it.



[31:00]

I mean, architecture was hard, you know, it was—it was very hard, very challenging, and so made a lot of—and—that—it—it's just that—that's where the balance started. I st—I started to make a lot of friends from my social world the black folks in the—in the fall and the spring, you know, it was just, all these black folks who I could see, Oh he's one of the cools guys, because I'm an observant guy, I know who's cool whose the dorks, I was a dork, so, but the cool guys respected somebody in college that had—got good grades, you got respect in college. In high school it was like he's a—he's a nobody, but in college that—oh you're an architecture student? Oh, okay. So they give you some respect, and so they kinda let you into their world and I had a lot of young men who were able to mentor me.

[32:00]

And socially, uh, to just you know, learn—learn how to talk, learn how to carry myself, learn how to dress, you know, just—just be a better young man and—and so—so that was—that was good, um, for—for me, those first two quarters, and so I get to spring quarter, and—and now I'm in—I'm introduced into the white world, the world of architecture, and that was—that was—that was fun, I mean, it was just a lot of fun, because I had—I had all my support in the black world and then i come in to—to architecture where, you know, it was at—at that time, uh, there might have been one or two other black students in architecture, and so I just started to make friends, um, with just all the other—all the other folks, I mean it's just another door of opportunity or another world that's opened up to me and I made friends, uh, with uh, just white young white men that, you know, are still—still friends—still to this day.

[33:00]

Lifetime friendships through, just through recognizing the commonalties, the passion that we had for architecture the passion that we had for music, I shared my music with them they shared their music with me, so I got exposed to what I would—good rock music, you know? In the dorm and you'd have to listen to—I still don't like Lynyrd Skynyrd, I'm sorry whoever Lynyrd Skynyrd fans out there, I'm sorry, but I don't like Lynyrd Skynyrd because it just, those concrete block walls—that sound just resonated through the—through the walls but then you know, my friends would introduce me to groups like Yes; and Emerson, Lake & Palmer; Led Zeppelin; and I was like now that's music, that's some good music that I still play to this day and I introduce my kids to that music and they play that music, so they get a good balance of exposure then.

[34:00]

It's not just rap and it's not just rhythm and blues and soul but there's also rock, there's also jazz, there's also—even classical, so those—that kind of exposure in

architecture, I wouldn't have gotten anywhere else so it—I feel very fortunate that I was able to enter a balanced world and see the best of both worlds and see the merit in both worlds and look at—look at things from a position of what's good as opposed to what's bad, or what we have in common as opposed to what we differ—our differences. And it was just—that—those five years at—in architecture, it was just—it was a—architecture is a community, it—it's like you're living in a community. You're not just like, maybe you go to a class, and you go home, and come back to a class and there are people in you—in your class, but these are people that you literally live with.

[35:00]

And I was able to see the humanity of white folks, I mean, I didn't know, just like they didn't know who I was. It—it's like you see, people who are different you see in one dimension when you don't know them, but when you get to live with them, you see several dimensions and I think what was—what was interesting I think, it's my theory, is that, white folks were able to see multi—dimensions of a—of a black man, because they come from a mindset of superiority, and so their mindset, they see that this black man is competing with them and beating them in some cases, so that changes their perspective.

[36:00]

Now I come from a perspective of white men and, I'm not going to say "superiority," but certainly there is that concept of white supremacy that permeates our society. Then I see another dimension of white men, their insecurities, their weaknesses, their flaws. So I don't see them as this one dimensional character that represents white supremacy. I see them as a human, with flaws and weaknesses, so that gives—that informs me better, and it was it's just incredible how valuable that was for me once I left Ball State and when—to corporate America where, in most—in many cases, I may go to—into a conference and I'm the only black man there, then I look around a table full of white men and I see those kids—I see, oh, you look like so-and-so he was a jerk, oh you look like him he was scary.

[37:00]

You know, I see beyond the stiffness and all that I see their humanity and so it's not that sense of intimidation isn't there and so that's what I—that's the biggest thing that I got out of—out of that is I see the human being, I don't—I don't see just a white man, I don't s—well I never just see a black man, but I see their humanity and I see if they see me as a human it—as a human if they see me in dimensions as opposed to just one and that—and that's—it goes both ways. Black folks can see a white person as just one dimension, white person can see a black person as just one dimension and those are the mistakes that are made. And that's how I've learned to look past that.

Munro: Going back to the fraternity you joined—

Wiley: Mm—hmm.

Munro: —which fraternity was that?

Wiley: Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Phi Nu Pi. [Wiley laughs]

Munro: Why did you choose that one over any other one?

Wiley: Beause they were the coolest, Kappas ran the yard [Wiley laughs] in Ball State.

[38:00]

We ran the yard, and that's true. You ask anybody and—that was at Ball State in between '74 and '79, Kappa's ran the yard, they were the—they was the coolest brothers, you know, they were—what did they call us? Pretty boys—animals and pretty boys, that's what they called us, and we were, it—just the stature of the fraternity I was—I was drawn to that, and the mentors that I had, as I mentioned earlier, were Kappas, they just drew me in, and they were couple—three years older than me, and they would just share with me their—the life experience, they'd teach me. So there are some principles of just growing up and maturity that they taught me that your father can't teach you because he doesn't know, you know, it's another generation.

[39:00]

But somebody—it's like a big brother, and they—that world they just embraced me and—we made friends—the friends in the dorm, we all chose Kappa, my good friends that I just would gravitated to in the dorm, and we'd go to parties together and we chose Kappa Alpha Psi. And once again, I have friends to this day that I talk to regularly, that are—either I pledged with them or they're in my fraternity, and it's just—was another one of those great decisions—that's not one of those decisions where I could have been something, that was a decision that I'm very happy that I made to pledge Kappa. It's a—it's a great fraternity. I will say that I have a lot of respect for all Greek organizations, black Greek organizations and all Greek org—Greek letter organizations. I think they do a lot for the community, it's not just a social organization, it's a community organization.

[40:00]

So once you graduate, especially when you graduate, uh, we have what we call a Guide Right program, which is a mentorship program, we have scholarship program, so, it gets the fraternity is much more community oriented when you graduate and you do more things that are way more community oriented than social oriented, but the five years I was here was party. [Wiley laughs] it was a good time.

Munro: So were there any of the community and things that you did while you were still attending school?

Wiley: Here?

Munro: Or w—or was it all just social?

Wiley: Yeah, I had no time, and I'm not making excuses but between architecture and any other thing, that was it. Our—even back then, I would—on a Friday or Saturday night, I'd go to the parties, it'd be over one or two o'clock, back to the architecture building.

[41:00]

Two in the morning—two in the morning to four in the morning. It was—and then, you know, just sleep when you can. Archit—architecture was so consuming, I didn't even go to church. I don't think I went to church the five years I was—I was in school. I can't—I know I didn't go to church in Muncie, when I would go home, I would go to church, but it was just—you're just so tired you're just so happy to get some rest, I was not—I stopped playing tennis, I didn't—I had to give up a lot to get through architecture, it was—it was a very, very difficult program for me, it's very consuming.

Munro: Other than the semester that you were pledging, did being in the fraternity with your grades and your work with architecture?

Wiley: Mmm, not really. I wouldn't say it hurt it.

[42:00]

But I mean, I guess I could have been in the architecture building when I went to all those parties, but I think, truly, school is social and academic, that's the beauty of school and that—that's what I want to encourage my two sons to balance that. But as I graduated, I have fraternity brothers who have absolutely provided business opportunities for me and my—and my business. So that is where the benefit of a fraternity comes, if you are active in your fraternity that there are absolutely opportunities for business networking and business development.

Munro: Is that how you then got your first job after graduation?

Wiley: Mmm, no, I wasn't that fortunate. [Wiley and Munro laugh] It wasn't that easy. [Wiley laughs] My first job.

[43:00]

Everything's a good story, you made me remember that. Our—Ball State, we had a culture, thesis year, of your resume, we put together good resumes. We would, some people would just use one page, eight-and-a-half by eleven, but we came up

with this concept of an eleven by seventeen where you can show your work, your architectural work on eleven by seventeen you have your curriculum vitae, the—you have examples of your work, models, and drawings back then. And people would create different formats, so we all had some good resumes. I did a good resume, I had my picture on it, and I purposely did that, it's like, I knew who I was, I know—I know I'm black. And I don't want to go someplace—I'm flying—because I knew I was leaving Indiana, I had to leave the cold weather, I had to get out.

[44:00]

So I sent resumes to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Atlanta, Houston, and, I think, Dallas, and I got a significant amount of responses to "yes, we're—we'd be interested in talking to you when you come out. Call and let's set up an interview. And so I got my first round, I got my ticket to go to Los Angeles and San Francisco, and when I got to Los Angeles, I had about six, seven interviews, and they all offered me a job. But there was one very special place, and that was Gruen Associates. And I'll never forget it, I, you know, I got into the world of these great lobbies and offices all over the place, Beverly Hills, Century City. It's just that exposure to a whole new world. And I went into the lobby of Gruen Associates and it was very internationally designed.

[45:00]

And told them who I was, I was there to see Ramesh Patel, he was director of design. And this black woman with silver hair and caramel toned skin comes out and I—and she introduces herself as Norma Skelaric. I thought it was his secretary. Norma Skelaric was the director of architecture at Gruen, she was the first black woman to be licensed in the United States. This is who is interviewing me, and I was just, like, blown away, I was, like, intimidated, blown away, surprised, and I just had to get it all together all at once. And she took me into the—to the office and we did an interview and, one of the great things about Ball State's program is they had, at that time, a requirement for a six month internship and I did my internship in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Grensfeld Urban [unintelligible] Associates.

[46:00]

And I did a really good set of work and drawings for—it was for—it was a storage facility and then I did a historic building elevation. And so I showed those plans to her, and back then you had to draw, not computer, by hand draw. And that's why I got those offers because people could see I could draw, and if you can draw, at a—at an entry level, then you have some value because they can pay you cheaply and you can produce, and so now looking back I see why I got the offers. And she offered me a job and she walked me around to an office full of—full of white man, a sea full of white men and I'm like wow this lady this sister's over all these guys? And she took me to this one guy who was a brother, it was a couple

years older than me, he was from LA his name was Steve Lot, he looked so cool he had like a gold chain and just real cool. And Steve Lot and I are still partners to this day, he's my business partner. And I just said "this is my place this is—this is where I'm going to start my life in architecture, I'm starting it right here."

[47:00]

And I didn't look—I had my ticket to San Francisco, never used it. I took that job and it was less than the—some of the others. \$6.75 an hour I still have the resume where she wrote it down "very good prospects, \$6.75 an hour" and that's where I started life in LA.

Munro: Was there any other reasons why you chose LA?

Wiley: The weather. Oh, may—yeah, I—my girlfriend happened to be there [Wiley laughs] yeah, my girlfriend from Ball State, Rhoda, she was there. And so that was why—that was the first city I was going to check out. And you know things just went so well, it's like, this is—this is the place. And, any other reasons?

[48:00]

Uh, my uncle I had—my father's brother, Charles Wiley, was there and that's—I stayed with him for the interviews. And he's—his world was just like my work in Indianapolis, inner-city, a blue collar, he worked for Alcoa Aluminum. So I knew the world and I was quite comfortable there, so, him—his presence is like I had some family, and with Norma Skelarie, to work under her, that was—that was it. And LA, I mean, it—it's LA, I got a job in LA, you know, this is it. [Wiley laughs] Coming from Indiana.

Munro: How long did you work at Gruen before you moved on?

Wiley: Five years, I was there, and that was—that was just another wonderful experience and I will say that Ball State prepared me so well to compete. Ball State's program is about completing the thought.

[49:00]

There—it's all good to have pretty pictures, because that's what we—we're good at as architects, is creating these great designs but we—it's not thought through, but Ball State makes you think through the process, they want to see a complete—the want to see a floor plan, they want to see a structural grid, they want to see a section, they want to see elevations to show that you have completed the thought of your—of your concept. It's not "oh that's a great sketch, but you don't have any plans or elevations to back it up" it's not going to make it. Other schools it will, if the—if the sketch is compelling enough. Other schools who are experimental will allow that and they will—they will pass that. Ball State will not. So we are—we are a very practical curriculum and so I took that practicality to Los Angeles, and at the time Gruen hired about 8 grads, we call them graduate architects, right out

of school, and they were all from the Ivy League schools.

[50:00]

[Wiley laughs] you know, the—the Harvards, the Yales, then the Stanfords, the USC. And they all were these elitists that, they were talking—they were talking names I hadn't even heard of—of arch—Rim Coolhouse, I'm like "who is that, he's—he sure has a cool name but I've never heard of him." You know, they're just talking. And then they're kinda looking at me, I'm coming from Indiana and, you know, country bumpkin' I'm wearing polyester, plaids, big collars, and they just kinda looked at me and, like, [Wiley laughs]. But I knew how to draw, and I knew how to complete the thought and everybody was competing, they want to get licensed, the want to move up the corporate ladder, and so it was just this competition. Friendly, and first, they're kinda laughing at me because of my country-like attire, so I'm observant, I can see that I need to step up my program [Wiley laughs] and my attire so I kinda get it together, um, in my attire, so I'm getting up to that level.

[51:00]

And in performance, I'm out performing them, my drawings are clearly better than theirs, my lettering is clearly better than theirs so the bosses are coming to me for work to do certain assignments and they're kinda looking. But they're still playing their games. The pretty girl tries to cozy up to the boss and then the white guy tries to talk all this social stuff and I'm just doing my job. And we had Norma Skelaric gave, after work, she gave tutoring sessions on the exam, because you have to take one twelve-hour exam to qualify to take the design—to take the professional exam, it's called the design exam. And she would—she would have these tutoring session that she teaches us the process so we all went to the tutoring session. And so the—come time for the twelve-hour exam, out of the seven to eight people that take the exam, I was the only one to pass.

[52:00]

So, automatically I've now separated myself from the pack. And then I went on to be the first one to get licensed, so separated more, and then I went on and become the first one to get—become an associate and then everybody started leaving. It was like, he's just left us behind, so they went on to other places, and I thought that was—that was funny. And I enjoyed the competition, but at that time, then I saw the glass ceiling, and I saw it through Norma. Norma had been at the firm for over twenty years and she got—she was an associate but much higher than me I guess a senior associate, the next step is to become a vice president. And I saw they brought this white man in that was not even closely as talented as her—as—in some other role, and he got promoted to the vice president.

[53:00]

I was like, what? How you going to not pro—promote Norma? And then it's like,

well they do that to her, and I know how great she is, I can imagine what they'll do to me. And so it's just at that point I saw the glass ceiling and then I, you know, just—I had determined in my mind, okay, I've got—I've got to kinda wrap it up here. And um, that was in nine—that was in 1983—1982 or 1983 when that happened. And by 1984 another major event happened that made me decide, okay, it's time to go, it's time to go now. And I didn't know what I wanted to do I just knew it was time to leave Gruen. Great experience, great, great time, great relationships. It was time to go, and I, at that time, decided I'm going to start my own firm.

[54:00]

I could go to another firm, but I'm just going to hit another glass ceiling. So I'm going to start my own firm, and that was in 1984, RAW Architecture was born. And it's—RAW happened to be my initials R-A-W and I asked my—he was my friend at that time, Steve, I said "Hey Steve, what do you think about the name RAW Architecture?" He was like Yeah, that's a good name, I like that." [Wiley laughs] he didn't know those were my initials, and so RAW got started. I was going to start in my apartment—I had a one-bedroom apartment and I'm like, look I'm just start—I got—all you need back then is a drawing board, like we saw in the architecture building, just a drawing board, that's all you need, and I figured I could do whatever I need to do to get started out of my apartment. And Steve at that time by that time, Steve had left to do entrepreneurial things, and he had an ice cream parlor, he had a child care center.

[55:00]

He had this room he had rented out it was about ten by ten and it was going to be a classroom for a traffic school that he had and he said "Well, I'll let you use that classroom, I was going to use for the office, that—that'll be my investment. So he kinda invested in the company, by letting me use that office. And it just—it just went from there. It just literally went from there in 1984.

Munro: What were the biggest challenges for starting a new business?

Wiley: The biggest challenges are still the biggest challenges, [Munro laughs] they have not changed. Oh my goodness, the biggest challenge is really breaking that ceiling—breaking that ceiling of smaller projects into the larger projects. It's almost like it's still an artificial ceiling, whereas, it's a corporate title in the corporate structure, but in the business structure it's the size of projects.

[56:00]

The—we do a tremendous amount of renovations and repairs of existing buildings like we could—we'll come into this building and reconfigure the classrooms and renovate, modernize certain components of the building, but we can't get the building. And it's not that we're not able, it's just, we can't break that barrier. It's political, it's social, it's, um, what's—strategic. And that's the biggest challenge is



to break that barrier of securing a major commission. We've been in business for thirty-three years and we have not been able to consistently get into any—say—major structure.

[57:00]

And, I mean, by major, I'm not talking, you know, a hundred million dollar or billion dollar sky—hi—sky scraper. I'm talking about maybe a twenty-five to thirty million dollar project, it's hard to—it's just hard to actually win—to win the commission, we get short listed all the time, but to win the commission, that's been—that's been the challenge. There are many reasons behind that, but that—that's the challenge.

Munro: So is it similar, then, to how maybe a new guy who's white comes in and is able to surpass you? Are you seeing younger firms that are getting jobs, or getting the bigger jobs that you would want?

Wiley: Absolutely, absolutely and it's more a matter of access, you know, they just get access.

[58:00]

It's—architecture is a very social, political profession, it has historically been a white male elitist profession, so it starts from that point and trickles down. Architecture requires a tremendous amount of finance, and the finance is in—held in the hands of the elite, and in the public sector, the government sector, the finance is in—held in the hands of the politicians. So either I'm a friend of the elite, which I'm not, I started off blue collar and I'm proud of that and I'm—don't see myself being this elitist, so access to those places is not possible. So my opportunity would then be in the public sector like universities, the government buildings, federal government, city government. Those contracts, those commissions are also highly social, political, mainly social.

[59:00]

I'm sorry, mainly political. So politically, then I have to align myself with politicians and the paradox that I have as a black architect, especially now, is you either align yourself with a corrupt politician so it's all that pay to play, quid pro quo is the name they use, but, there's something—there's some transactional things that—that's outside of my integrity box. And then the good politicians are now subscribing to transparency, where they don't want to have any kind of appearance of favoritism. So, we're in this paradox of well I'm not going to go the pay to play route because I'm just—that's just outside of my integrity box.

[1:00:00]

And the good politicians that really respect what we're doing, they like to help, but they're not going to tilt the scales our way because that will show favoritism and

that's when they get called to the corporate, so—but back in the day that's exactly how it worked—that's exactly how it worked. Black polititans would demand that a developer or an institution engage a black architect to do the work, that's just how it worked and it wasn't necessarily a pay to play it's just they realize that that's the only way that they're going to be able to be afford those opportunities to build their practice. So that's the challenge and we're looking at—we're still looking at creative ways to break that ceiling, I think at the—at the very minimum, it's my job to crack the ceiling, I'm going to crack it.

[1:01:00]

I can promise you that. And somebody behind me is going to break through it, but I know what my assignment is what my purpose is my generation has to crack that ceiling, and we'll crack it.

Munro: I'm sure that this isn't just an LA thing, where this is happening, or not happening, as the case may be for black architects getting jobs—or the better jobs, but have you noticed any places that the glass ceiling has at least cracked? Or would you say that this is just the whole US is—

Wiley: There's—

Munro: —is doing this?

Wiley: It's—there's two answers to that, I always give somebody a test, point one building out on this campus, or anywhere you know, that's designed by a black architect.

Munro: Probably not any of them.

Wiley: None of them. And that—so it's a national, I don't want to say epidemic, but [Wiley laughs] close to that. It's a national—and I think I know a theory I'll share with you, but I'll get to that, okay.

[1:02:00]

But there is hope, there are some architects. Number one, David Adjaye, now he's Nigerian, he's African, but he just—and I just got back from DC, he designed the African American History Museum for the Smithsonian. Beautiful, I mean it's just inspiring it just blows you away, it's just such a beautiful building, such a powerful building, such an impact in that area of all of those museums that it's different, and it's powerful, but it adds to the dialog, he's—he brought his self, his being into this environment that just enriches it, and that's what people—I hope people will see, that society is denying themselves an opportunity to enrich the architectural dialog by keeping us out, they—they're just—it—it's to society's detriment that we don't—we're not allowed to practice and architecture is a practice.

[1:03:00]

Practice means you've got to try it, try it again, try it again, we don't get to practice you have to prac—you've got to build one building see what's good, see what's not good see what works see what doesn't work, do it again, experiment with the materials see what works see how it doesn't work, experiment with mass and see how it works with light. That's practice, when we don't get to practice, we don't get to hone our skills. Soc—the society loses, yeah I lose, you know, personally, but society loses. So I do see—I do see that ceiling is going to crack, that's why I guarantee is because David Adjaye, though he's African, he made a mark, he made a mark on what can an African architect—a black—from a black perspective, can do and how rich it can be, and how much it can contribute to society, so I'm inspired by that, that just gives me more energy, more power, if you will, to keep trying, to keep pushing, to keep working for that opportunity.

[1:04:00]

I'm not a David Adjaye, he's extremely gifted, it's going to take me—I've got to try it a few times I don't, you know, and he probably did because he's done work all over the world, but I've got to get few projects under my belt, kinda look and see what worked and what didn't work. And then you're going to see—I'm going to have a nice masterpiece, RAW will have some signature projects, I'm sure of it, it's just taking a little longer than I would expect but I believe that we will.

Munro: You mentioned earlier an organization or a project that you started about eight years ago. Was this the Menformation?

Wiley: Yes, yes.

Munro: Uh, w—could you explain what this organa—organization is about?

[1:05:00]

Wiley: Sure, well it started, with my pastor, Frank Reidy, who's I'm sorry, Frank Wilson, who is no longer with us, may he rest in peace. We were at a breakfast and I got up and asked the question, "What are we doing as men? We got up this morning, got in our cars, drove past all these homeless men, all these drug addicts, in our communities. All this devastation and desolation, normally on a Sunday we get up, do that same thing, go in to church, close the doors, shout 'halleluiah' praise God, end the service, go home, drive right past those same homeless people, the same desolation, the same, just, depravity, and get up and go to work the next morning. What are we doing?" And I—he said "well I'm glad you asked that. I wan—I had a vision of starting a mentorship program and I want you to start it." So, he died later after that.

[1:06:00]

But I started it in my house with a group of my prayer partners, I had three prayer

partners: James Lincoln, Marcus Farrow, and Sunny Porter, and we—between us we drew about ten other men together and we formed Menformation. And Menformation is a faith based mentorship program that teaches young men from twelve to eighteen, generally, life skills, how to—how to handle yourself when you get pulled over by the cops, how to talk to women, how to deal with the fact that you don't have a father in your house. We take them places we take them fishing, most of them have—they live in Los Angeles, many of them haven't been to the beach before. I'm serious, they haven't been to the beach before let alone being on a boat. Most of them had never been on a boat before, and almost all of them had never been fishing.

[1:07:00]

And so to expose them to those, just, elements of life and to start to open up their world is tremendous. And of course as the—every year, I do the black history—I call it from “Adam and Eve to Barack Obama in 30 minutes.” I do a 30 minute presentation, I use a lot of imagery, to just open up their minds to black history starts from the very beginning not just as slavery. But that's something we have—we have a partnership with Challenger's Boys and Girls Club, so we meet at Challenger's Boys and Girls Club in south Los Angeles, right in the heart of all the madness and we just really share with those boys, and it's so impactful by our presence, the presence of, like, ten black men who are in order, and it just creates order, there's no misbehaving, there's no acting out. These—and these boys are problem boys, most of them don't—they come from family households.

[1:08:00]

Most of them are behavioral problems at school, but they come in and they are in order. And I think it's so important for young black boys to see older black men who are working, who are educated, who are doing something other than hanging out in the corner selling drugs, hustling, talking crazy, um, that they see that alternative, and it gives them some hope and that's something that we feel very good that we've been able to sustain the organization, we want to grow—we want to take it nationwide. That's again, that's another challenge to pass that chasm, to build or grow an organization requires that somebody has to work full time and you have to be able to pay that person unless they have to be elite which none of us are, so that's the challenge is that we do it organically, we just do it with—from our—resources from our own pockets.

[1:09:00]

We get small grants, and we just keep it—we keep it going, but eventually we want to get a large grant to be able to pay—compensate, an executive director who could then start to organize, to take the brand we definitely have a brand, and it's very important that you have the trust of the parents and you have the trust of the community and you have—you partner with the lo—we can nationally partner with the Challenger Boys and Girls club, it's important that we do background

checks of the men, uh, we don't—we haven't had no problems and we don't want any of those kinds of problems. So we're very serious about this organization and it's been great cause we have now graduates who come back, who started eight years ago and they're in college now and they come back and they talk about how they started, and they get to be the inspirational speakers at our—at our—when we have our meetings once a month to the kids.

[1:10:00]

And they can better relate to the kids because you know they—they're not my age, sixty, fifty, they're in fifties and sixties in men, but these guys are like eighteen, twenty. So they can really talk to the—to the young men, so it's been a—it's been—now we're seeing this generation that's coming in behind us and it's very encouraging. It's been a great experience.

Munro: For my final question topic I'd like to move on to your personal and your family life, when and where did you meet your wife—or your—yes.

Wiley: When and where did I meet my wife Andy, hey Andy, what's happening? [Wiley laughs] My wife Andy, my goodness, that's one of the highlights of my life, aw, man. I met Andy in 1991. She had just relocated to Los Angeles, it was probably—she'd probably been here a couple of months in Los Angeles.

[1:11:00]

And there was a political fundraiser at this place called the City Club in downtown Los Angeles. It's like on the fifty-first floor of this office building, and so I went there by myself, and I walked in the room—this room full of—full of people, and I walked by and I saw this group of men standing around this person, I think she was sitting, and I look and they were standing around this gorgeous woman this beautiful woman. And she kind agave me a look, and I'm like "oh, okay" [Wiley laughs] I'm guessing see—get back to her at some point. And the place was beautiful. And a lot of people talking and networking all this kind of stuff and it's on the fiftieth floor so I'm just standing out there enjoying the view of the city.

[1:12:00]

I keep glancing over and these guys aren't leaving and it's like, come on, they just keep hanging around, and I'm like, the whole night, aw, man. So I'm about to leave so I go by—back where that group of men are and I kinda catch her eye again and as—I'm going in, I'm just going in [Wiley laughs] and introducing myself. And I introduce myself and, you know, she was just a—she was beautiful—she's a beautiful woman inside and out. And I introduce myself and she said who she was, she was an electrical engineer. Aw—oh, so, it was, like—we had something in common so I was able to kinda push the other guys aside since I was an architect and we just had a good dialog and those other guys are just like [Wiley laughs] you know. And so actually I was able to get her number

and I called her the very next day, and we went out that—that was a Friday, I called her Saturday, we went out Sunday.

[1:13:00]

I took her to, it was called Art Walk in the Park in Beverly Hills it was an outdoor art festival. And so, she lived in Hollywood, and I went to pick her up and when I picked her up she was even more beautiful than when I saw her at the event. And I was done, I was [Wiley laughs] that was it for me. And we just had a wonderful time on that first date. And that was in 1991, the relationship was on and off for a few years and we got married in 1996, in January 1996, and we had our first child, Roland, in December of 1996. I was forty at the time so I didn't have a lot of time to be waiting to have kids and then we had Randall in 1998.

[1:14:00]

And that is just—that's the whole core of my life. Of being a man of God, being a husband, and being a father, of those two boys, and being an architect. That's—that is basically my life.

Munro: Do you—how's your relationship with your parents today? Are you still very close to them?

Wiley: Oh yeah, yeah I surprised them last night [Munro laughs] coming in. I didn't—I didn't tell them I was coming. I told my sister and so she told my mom but she didn't tell my dad. And so, I didn't get in until, like, one, but my dad's on some strange clock he's always up at one eating, and so I went into his bedroom and just the look on his—on his face of surprise he was just so, so happy to see me. We sat down we had a beer last night just kinda talked—talk—he would have kept talking but I was like "dad, I've got to go to bed" [Wiley laughs]. But our relationship has gotten so much better as I've gotten older.

[1:15:00]

Because I appreciate what he did for me and for my family. I appreciate how he sacrificed, how he gave. As growing up, we did not have a close relationship, as I said I was very shy and, he didn't—he didn't know how to be a dad, his dad died when he was seven years old, he had seven brothers and sisters, so there was eight of them, and he was raised by his mom, and it was a miracle, it was a blessing that they were able to survive and all of the children grew up to be—to do well. Teachers—my dad and his brothers, the women were all teachers, my dad and his brothers were all just good family men, who raised good children. And he just—he stayed in there and I'm so grateful to him because I see what happens when the dad leaves the house.

[1:16:00]

I see what happens in all these other families who didn't have a dad. And they

weren't able, my sister's doing well, her kids are doing well, we all have this example of a—of a core of a family, a mom and a dad that stay together. We've all got our problems, we've all got our flaws. But not withstanding that we stayed together, they stayed together. And that's what motivates me to stay together. Because I think divorce rates are even higher now, and everybody thinks they've got a better option but I see my wife and how hard she works to raise our children, and I see the benefits, now, I see them growing up to be good young men, and then I look at how my dad worked and stayed—hung in there, didn't go out, you know, acting crazy, came home every day, brought his check home every day.

[1:17:00]

Provided for our family that set a role model for me, because I know that's baseline, you know, I can—I have to do that. And I want to do better, and I want my sons to be better fathers. I'm not the greatest father, I do the best that I can. And I hope I've been able to build off of the foundation that my dad set for me, and he's told me as much that he's just very proud of what I've been able to accomplish and he's very happy, you know, at ninety-one years old he can—he can—he's happy, he feels that he did the right thing and I want to grow to be ninety-one and feel the same way.

Munro: So, before concluding this interview, is there anything that I didn't cover or ask about that you would like to be included?

Wiley: Oh, my theory, I had—

Munro: Oh—

Wiley: —the—I had the—

Munro: that's right.

Wiley: theory about architecture. Architecture and acting, if you notice.

[1:18:00]

Black actors and ar—black architects have something in common, and that is immortality. Actors' films are immortality, if you play a good role like Charlton Heston as Moses, you're immortal. If you design a great building like the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building, you are immortal, your work is immortal. Immortality is something that is very precious in our society, immortality has always been something that's very precious, held by the power structure. Egypt, these monuments are built for immortality. So that's something that the power structure holds onto very tightly. And the power structure is, for the most part, white males in America, so to allow access to that immortality is going to be very limited.

[1:19:00]

And there are some that will rise above because of extreme talent, there are black architects like Paul Williams and David Adjaye, they have extreme talent, Paul Williams can draw upside, I can't draw upside-down. And that—I believe that applies to women as well, Zaha Hadid, because of extreme talent, and so, that's the theory is this immortality, it's that's what architecture gives you. And that's a very, very precious commodity, if you will that is not given up very easily.

Munro: Alright, so, anything else other than your theory?

Wiley: My theory? Just in closing that I hope that whoever is watching this would be inspired to always to do their best and strive for excellence.

[1:20:00]

I hope that my grandkids, if they watch this, will be inspired to follow God, to trust him, to believe in Him, and to live their life according to godly principles. I believe that we're moving into a time of extreme confusion and there needs to be some sense of order and that's where the pri—the Biblical principles give you order. I'm not one to judge or condemn anybody, but I believe love is extremely important, I believe that love is the key to everything. And if you look at any situation through a lens of love, that's where you're going to find a solution.

Munro: Alright, well then on behalf of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project—

Wiley: Is that acronyms going on somewhere? [Wiley laughs]

Munro: [Munro laughs] I'd like to thank you for taking the time to speak with me today.

Wiley: Alright, well thank you, Charity, God bless you.

[1:21:01]

*End of interview*



**Education: (High School Name, City and State, and Date Diploma or GED Received):**

Arsenal Technical High School, Indianapolis, IN June 1974

**Education: College or University Name(s), City and State, Dates Attended, Degree(s) Received, Major(s) and Minor(s), Certification(s):**

Ball State University, Muncie IN, May 1979  
 Bachelor of Architecture  
 Bachelor of Science in Environmental Design

*Why not Cornell? what interesting / Major?*

**Fraternal, social, political, religious organizations you were a member of at BSU:**

**Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity** - *why choose this fraternity organization?*

**Employment: Employer(s) Name, City and State, Position Title, Dates of Employment:**

Gruen Associates, Los Angeles, CA Associate Architect July 1979 to Sept. 1984

RAW International, Los Angeles, CA Founding Partner Sept. 1984 to Present

*Did you have any de  
while employed at  
Gruen Associates?*

*Why LA? So far from home?*

**If Married, Name of Spouse and Date Married:**

Andrea McGrath Wiley - Married January 1996

**Name(s) and Age(s) of Children:**

Roland A. Wiley, III 20 years old  
 Randall Austin Wiley 18 years old

## Roland Wiley Information Collected from Research

Wiley, Roland. *LinkedIn*. N.d., <https://www.linkedin.com/in/roland-wiley-0607726> (Accessed Mar. 27, 2017).

- Owner of RAW International from September 1984 to present (32yrs 7 months) in LA
- Consulting Architect from 1995 - 1999 for Forum Enterprises
- Associate for Gruen Associates from July 1979 to September 1994 (the same year he founded RAW International)
- Founding Board Member and Treasurer of Ward Economic Development Corporation starting in July of 1988
- 

Whiteson, Leon. "The RAW Approach: It Succeeds." *Los Angeles Times*, last modified Aug. 3, 1990, [http://articles.latimes.com/1990-08-03/news/vw-1150\\_1\\_raw-architecture](http://articles.latimes.com/1990-08-03/news/vw-1150_1_raw-architecture) (Accessed Mar. 27, 2017).

- Founded RAW International with Steven Lewis and Steven Lott

Davis, Nelson. "Success Story of Roland Wiley - Raw International, Inc - MAKING IT! TV." N.d. YouTube video, 5:34. Posted Apr. 24, 2009. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9b\\_O74LcaJ0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9b_O74LcaJ0) (Accessed Mar. 27, 2017).

"About Us." *RAW International*, n.d. <https://www.rawinternational.com/our%20story> (Accessed Mar. 27, 2017).

- "Has delivered more than \$2 billion of new construction and renovation for transit, federal, public works, higher education, healthcare, corporate, hospitality, and retail projects."

Pre-Interview Notes with Mr. Roland Wiley

Date of pre-interview: 3/13/17

Time: 3:29 – 3:42pm

Notes:

-Mr. Wiley attended BSU from 1974 to 1979

-His major was Architecture

-Why BSU: "A funny story." He didn't know much about colleges, so he sent out many applications, but only got accepted from Cornell and Ball State. He didn't want to go to New York, so he settled on Ball State.

-Coming to BSU from the inner city of Indianapolis was "a whole new world. Lots of possibilities and activities here." He did not have Architecture classes for his freshman year, so he jumped into the social activities that campus had to offer.

-He decided to pledge a fraternity the same year he started his Architecture classes. He missed a LOT of sleep. He would go from the Arch. Building to study tables then back to the Arch building. His fraternity brothers marched there with him. The cultural support of his black fraternity brothers was crucial, as there weren't many black students in Architecture.

-He called his busy year "one of the most exciting times of my life," and felt he had the best of both worlds- in architecture and in the black fraternity.

-Even though his busy years were "a lot of fun," he "had no idea what I was getting into," by pledging and doing Architecture at the same time.

-But, being a social person with his fraternity provided needed balance to the all-consuming work of Architecture.

Pre-interview Notes with Mr. Roland Wiley

Friday night - Sunday evening

Date of pre-interview: 3/13/17

Time: 3:29 - 3:42pm

Notes:

-Mr. Wiley attended BSU from 1974 to 1979

-His major was Architecture

-Why BSU: "A funny story." He didn't know much about colleges, so he sent out many applications, but only got accepted from Cornell and Ball State. He didn't want to go to New York, so he settled on Ball State.

What's wrong  
with new  
jobs?

-Coming to BSU from the inner city of Indianapolis was "a whole new world. Lots of possibilities and activities here." He did not have Architecture classes for his freshman year, so he jumped into the social activities that campus had to offer.

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-Even though his busy years were "a lot of fun," he "had no idea what I was getting into," by pledging and doing Architecture at the same time.

-But, being a social person with his fraternity provided needed balance to the all-consuming work of Architecture.

How has having been in a Fraternity helped your  
career over the years?  
Have you stayed connected w/ your fraternity bros

Dist. Alumni

CAP 1pm

Questions for phone interview:

✓ Due to your interview being on a Saturday, there isn't much in the way of tours going on, however, I know a few Architecture majors who have said that they would be happy to take you around the CAP building.

✓ Is there anything that you do not want to be discussed in your interview?

Are there any questions you have about the interview or in general?

for me

Hello my name is Charity Munro, today's date is April 1st, 2017 and I am interviewing Mr. Roland Wiley on the Ball State campus, as part of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project.

Let's start with your childhood, when and where were you born?

Get names of parents and siblings.

Where did you go to school?

Were there any teachers in your grade school(s) that have stuck with you over the years?

Growing up, where did you learn about black history?

Growing up hearing about black stereotypes, did you ever accept them as true? When did you realize they weren't?

Did you ever feel pressured by friends or family to go to college? What was the appeal to you personally?

What does holding a higher education mean to you?

What were your reasons for choosing Ball State? Were there any other colleges or universities you considered?

What years did you attend ball state university?

When you began your freshman year, did you have any idea what you wanted to do with your life? When did you decide on Architecture?

Why did you choose Architecture as your major?

I understand that the same year you began your architecture classes you joined a fraternity, which one?

Why did you choose this Fraternity?

What sorts of activities did you engage in with your Fraternity Brothers?

How did being in a fraternity impact your studies? How has having been in a fraternity helped your career over the years?

Have you stayed connected with your brothers since college?

During your time here at Ball State, did you or anyone you know directly or indirectly experience discrimination? Was this the first time you had experienced this?

How soon after graduation did you leave for LA? Did you already have a job lined up when you left?

Any particular reason why you chose LA?

How long did you work at Gruen Associates?

Did you experience any discrimination while working there?

When did you found RAW International?

What were the challenges of starting a new business?

Have there been any significant bumps in the road?

How do you think your upbringing has impacted your life?

I understand you are involved in the Menformation organization in LA. Could you explain what this organization is about?

What was the inspiration for this organization?

When did you meet your wife?

Do you have any children? What are their names?

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Get names of parents and siblings.

Where did you go to school?

37  
Hazel Arsenal

Were there any teachers in your grade school(s) that have stuck with you over the years?

MLK

Growing up, where did you learn about black history? Own research

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Cappa Alpha Psi

When you began your freshman year, did you have any idea what you wanted to do with your life? When did you decide on Architecture?

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Internship to graduate

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What was the inspiration for this organization?

When did you meet your wife?

33 yrs

Do you have any children? What are their names?

Before concluding

Norma Skelanic

Andy her real  
name?



Dear Mr. Wiley,

Thank you for making your voice heard for the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project on April 1st, 2017. The information you provided in your interview was incredibly helpful. Your work with the Menformation Project and your mission to break the glass ceiling of the architecture world will be inspiring to those who view the recording in the future.

A review copy of the transcript for your interview will be completed and sent to you in the coming weeks. When looking it over, please make sure any proper names are spelled correctly and that the transcriber has accurately typed what you said. After you have returned your corrected transcript, we will make the necessary changes and send you a final copy to thank you for participating in this project.

Thank you again for your time and your information!

Charity Munro (interviewer)

## **General Questions for Interviewees**

Let's start with your childhood, when and where were you born?

Where did you go to school?

Were there any teachers in your grade school(s) that have stuck with you over the years?

(If they moved at some point as a child) When did you move from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_? What was that experience like?

(For those who were born/raised in Muncie), Ball State prides itself in its mission to link to the local community, do you remember any specific ways that Ball State and your local community connected?

Did you ever feel pressured by friends or family to go to college/join the military? What was the appeal to you personally?

Some of the most common reasons for students choosing Ball State over other colleges and universities over the years has been how close it is to home, and the relatively low costs and modest admission standards. What were your reasons for choosing Ball State? Were there any other colleges or universities you considered?

Edmonds and Geelhoed describe Ball State as having been relatively isolated from "real world" issues such as McCarthyism and student protest in the 1960s. When attending Ball State, how aware were you of these and similar issues? Did they concern you much at the time?

Despite its relative isolation, there were a few protests that occurred on campus regarding issues such as the Vietnam War in the 60s or the Civil Rights movement in the 80s and 90s. Were you a part of the protest group or attend any of the protests? Why or why not? Overall, would you describe the campus as having been more liberal or conservative?

What do you remember of the University President during your attendance? Would you consider him or her to have been active in student affairs?

During your time here at Ball State, did you or anyone you know directly or indirectly experience discrimination? Was this the first time you had experienced this?

Places like Tuhey Pool here in Muncie were not "legally" segregated, but socially segregated for a time, were there any places either here or elsewhere where you experienced this?

(For older interviewees who would have been around during the time of black businesses) There were many black-owned businesses in Muncie for a time, did you frequent any while studying at BSU? What places? Why there in particular?

### African American Image and Culture

Do you have any memories of stereotypes against African Americans in popular culture or marketing? If so, what are these stereotypes?

What kind of television shows do you remember watching? Did you feel you were well represented on these programs?

Did you take inspiration from African American TV and film stars breaking down barriers on screen? (i.e. playing roles other than servants, slaves, or maids.)

Fashion seems to have historically been a way for African Americans to reclaim their self worth. Have you had any experience with particular fashion trends in the black community?

Did Ball State's black student population have any specific trends while you attended?

Have you ever faced discrimination based on the way you styled your hair?

Have you had any experiences with project housing?

What did black owned businesses do for the black community?

Was there a particular African American role model you identified with growing up?

Do you listen to music made by black artists? Has it shaped your worldly perspective in any way?

Growing up hearing about black stereotypes, did you ever accept them as true? When did you realize they weren't?

Do you feel that the image of the African American has changed in the past few decades? Why or why not?

What do you think of history being taught as a "straight line of progress"?

### Life at Ball State and the Importance of Education

In college, were you an activist for civil rights? If so, how?

Did you or anyone you know attend a major march/rally for civil rights?

At Ball State, did you or anyone you know experience any form of discrimination or racism?

Would you say this racism was rooted in the community or in the university?

How would you describe the student body?

(side note) We know that the student body was not ever quick to protest or outwardly stand up for major events. We could ask if white or black students were more likely to support civil rights movements.

Has food played a role in strengthening your community? What do you remember about the food being served at Ball State University?

Did meals or dining locations strengthen ties in the Ball State black community?

Did you ever face colorism when you were a student at Ball State?

How do you think your experience would have differed if you attended a HBCU?

(For athletes) Did you ever feel as if your academic abilities were understated because of sports?

Did you feel as if athletics were the only way to obtain a higher education?

What does holding a higher education mean to you?

### Reactions and Responses to Historical Events

Do you remember anything about the National Black Political Convention that was held in Gary, Indiana in 1972?

Did you or people you knew benefit from the New Affirmative Action laws that were passed in the latter half of the twentieth century?

Growing up, what did you think of the activism and civil rights movement?

How did your parents explain these types of movements to you?

How did your parents explain events such as the murder of Emmett Till? Did it feel like murders/lynchings were distant events or did it feel like it could happen in the area?

Were your parents political activists? Did you take after them?

If not, how did they react to your activism (or lack thereof)?

Did you or anyone you know serve in the military? Did you/he/she ever regret serving due to the treatment received back home?

### Family Lineage and Traditions

Have you ever DNA traced back to your origins? If so what did you find?

Do you remember learning anything about slavery/the slave trade growing up? How much of it was in school vs. at home?

Have you been able to trace back lineage to any free blacks pre-civil war?

Slaves brought away from their homeland had to form new cultures of their own. In your own experience, have you ever had cultures that were specific to your community when compared to other African American communities in the country?

What kind of memorable traditions did your family hold?

Were there any related to food? Related to film/art?

Did you ever feel that you had to give up your traditions and culture to conform to the world around you?

If you did, how did this make you feel?

Have religion and religious traditions shaped your life?

**With specific reference to passages in the Lassiter book:**

Here in Muncie, Tuhey Pool had been socially segregated until 1956 (67). Where there any places that were socially segregated to you?

There were (and still are) many black-owned businesses in Muncie (88-89), did you frequent any while studying at BSU? What places? Why there?

Military service and higher education was valued by many in the black community (92), did you feel pressured to go to school/join the military? Or did you go on your own accord? What was the appeal to you personally?

TOSoMT provided a few different definitions by members of the black community of what a home is (101-102), how do you define it? Do you remember a particular place that you considered to be "home" growing up/in college?

Stories like "Black Annie" (160) and games of "the dozens" (163) were prevalent in many childhoods of Muncie, do you remember any of the stories told or games you played as a child?

TOSoMT mentions "hidden codes" within community events (234), were you consciously aware of such "codes"? If so, do you remember when you realized?

In 2003, Stefan Anderson, the chairman of the board of First Merchants Bank, asked "What are the barriers we must address to build bridges of understanding [each other]?" and answered with 1) the unwillingness for many to be frank about the realities of racism; 2) the fear of leaving individual comfort zones; 3) racial isolation in churches; 4) not understanding that some forms of racism are not seen by whites; and 5) looking behind at what has been done instead of looking ahead at what still needs to be done (249). Do you agree with his answers? Have any of them been resolved? Are there any that you think will be resolved within the current generation?

**2) With specific reference to passages in the Edmonds book:**

(For those who were born/raised in Muncie), Ball State prides itself in its mission to link to the local community (2), do you remember any specific ways that Ball State and your local community connected?

Edmonds and Geelhoed describe Ball State as having been relatively isolated from "real world" issues such as McCarthyism and student protest in the 1960s (2). When attending Ball State, how aware were you of these and similar issues? Did they concern you much at the time?

Ball State's original "family atmosphere" began to change to a more business oriented atmosphere in the 1970s (4), how would you describe the atmosphere of the campus during your attendance?

Former University President John Emens was very involved with the institution "from class scheduling to planning buildings to talking with students" (10), what do you remember of the University President of your time? Would you consider him or her to have been active in student affairs?

Ball state's closeness, low cost, and modest admission standards served to be very important factors in many students attending Ball State (171) do any of these factors apply to you? What other reasons did you have for choosing BSU?

Despite its relative isolation, there were a few protests that occurred on campus regarding issues such as the Vietnam War in the 60s (174) or the Civil Rights movement in the 80s and 90s (257). Were you a part of the protest group or attend any of the protests? Why or why not? Overall, would you describe the campus as having been more liberal or conservative?

Ball State was titled 18th out of 40 party schools nationally by Playboy magazine in 1987 (254), did this "status" reflect your time as a student?